

Dealing with Shortness of Breath



Shortness of breath is also called dyspnea or breathlessness. Some conditions make it difficult to get air in and out of the lungs. Feeling out of breath is very uncomfortable and tiring. It can also cause feelings of fear, nervousness, sadness, helplessness, anger, and frustration.

Signs of Shortness of Breath

Shortness of breath may occur during activity and even during rest. Some of the signs of shortness of breath may include:

- A feeling of not getting enough air
- Not able to take in a deep breath or inability to exhale fully
- Tiring out quickly
- A faster breathing rate.
- Being “winded” when talking.
- A restless and anxious feeling

Some things that may cause or increase feelings of shortness of breath include:

- Moving around, walking
- Talking.
- Anxiety.
- Bathing.
- Posture.
- Cough.
- Secretions.
- Climate, especially heat and humidity.
- Infection.

What You Can Do

There are many different ways to help decrease feelings of shortness of breath. Treatments for shortness of breath work differently for different people.

- **Medications**

Many different types of medicines can be used to help improve the symptoms associated with shortness of breath. Your physician may give you one or more of them to take. The types of medicine that will be suggested



will depend upon the symptoms that you are having and what is causing them.

- **Oxygen Therapy**

Sometimes a person may benefit from using oxygen. Ask your nurse or physician if oxygen would be helpful in your situation.

- **Respiratory Therapy**

A respiratory therapist may visit to assess your breathing and make recommendations for your treatment plan.

- **Helpful Hints**

Medications and other treatments may work better and give more relief when combined with these suggestions.

- Eliminate allergens, such as smoke, dust, and mold.
 - In dry winter air, use a cool mist humidifier to increase the moisture in the room.
 - Use a small fan to keep air circulating
 - Keep the room cool.
 - Elevate the head with pillows
 - Request an adjustable bed.
 - Certain positions can help with chest expansion. Sitting upright and leaning forward helps air to move in and out of the lungs. Breathing while lying on one side may be easier than while lying on the other.
 - Breathing through the mouth may cause dryness. Ice chips or a cold, moist washcloth may relieve feelings of dryness of the mouth.
 - Conserve energy. Rearrange the environment to reduce exertion. For example, move the phone next to the chair or bed.
 - Plan activities to conserve energy. Schedule activities to include rest time. For example, eat first, then rest, and then bathe.
 - Try to conserve energy to do those things that are enjoyable. For example, let someone assist with dressing and bathing so you feel up to doing more pleasant activities.
 - Try relaxation techniques, music, and visualization.
 - Be sure clothing around the neck and chest is loose and light weight.
- Your care team wants to help you breathe as comfortably as possible.

If shortness of breath comes on suddenly or is causing distress, please call your care team immediately.

