

# Managing Shortness of Breath

## What is shortness of breath (dyspnea)?

Shortness of breath is when it feels hard to breathe. People may describe it as not getting enough air, not being able to take a deep breath, or feeling like there isn't enough air in the room. It can feel different for each person.

## What can you do to help with shortness of breath?

There are many ways to help with shortness of breath. Here are some things that may help:

- Sit up straight in a chair instead of lying down.
- Use pillows to raise your head when lying in bed.
- Sit and lean forward with your hands on your knees or on a table.
- Try "pursed lip breathing": Take slow, deep breaths in through your nose, and breathe out slowly through puckered lips (like you're about to whistle).
- Use a fan or air conditioner to move air around.
- Use oxygen if your doctor prescribed it.
- Take any medicine your doctor gave you.
- Try relaxing activities like prayer, meditation, calming music, or massage.
- Let your doctor or nurse know if your shortness of breath gets worse.

## What should you tell your care team?

- Your shortness of breath gets worse.

## PATIENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION

- Your shortness of breath feels uncomfortable or upsetting.
- Your shortness of breath makes it hard to do normal activities.
- Your face, ears, nose, fingers, or toes turn a bluish color.

### Other helpful resources

Hospice Training for Caregivers and Families Video: Breathing  
Managing Shortness of Breath  
Shortness of Breath Stoplight Tool  
Using Morphine to Treat Symptoms