



PATIENT / FAMILY TEACHING SHEETS

MANAGING SHORTNESS OF BREATH

What is shortness of breath or dyspnea?

- A personal experience for each individual
- An uncomfortable feeling of having difficulty breathing
- Can be described as not getting enough air (a feeling that you cannot get your breath), may feel like the room is closing in, or there is not enough air in the room

When should I be worried about my shortness of breath?

- When it stops you from doing what you want to do
- When it causes you or your family fear or anxiety, nervousness or restlessness
- Bluish discoloration of face, nose, fingers, toes

What can be done?

The good news is that there is much you, your caregiver and the hospice/palliative care team can do for shortness of breath. The team will always try to discover the underlying cause and discuss treatments with your healthcare provider.

- Record what makes you feel short of breath and what decreases it
- Increase air movement by using an open window or fan
- Keep room cool – cool cloths to face, air conditioner, a bowl of ice in front of a fan
- Keep your environment quiet to decrease feelings of anxiety
- Elevate your head or sit in chair or recliner
- Relax with spiritual support, yoga, calming music, massage
- Focus on your breathing – take slow, deep breaths or use breathing exercises that the hospice/palliative team has taught you
- Use oxygen as directed by your healthcare team
- Take medication as directed by your physician
- Notify the team if your shortness of breath is not relieved