

Dyspnea

What is dyspnea?

Dyspnea is difficult or labored breathing, extreme shortness of breath, breathing discomfort, or breathlessness. This is a common symptom in people suffering from serious illnesses. Dyspnea can have a significant effect on a person's quality of life because the smallest physical activity can cause shortness of breath. Dyspnea is also common symptom near the end of life for many patients.

Possible Causes

- Ascites (fluid in the abdomen)
- Lung Disease
- Aspiration
- Obesity
- Some Cancers
- Pneumonia or other Infection
- COPD
- Pleural Effusion (excess fluid in the lungs)
- Deconditioning
- Pulmonary Embolus (blood clot in the lungs)
- Heart Failure

Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- Shortness of Breath while resting or with minor activity
- Feeling smothered or suffocated
- Chest tightness
- Stress
- Fear
- Unable to speak in full sentences
- Anxiety

Signs may include:

- Bluish colored lips and nail beds
- Cool and/or mottled (blotchy, red-purplish) extremities
- Fast, labored, and/or shallow breathing
- Needing to lean forward to help breathe easier
- Using neck, shoulder, chest, and stomach muscles to breathe
- Wheezing (a whistling or rattling sound in the chest)

If you need help with your symptoms, call VNA 24hrs a day:

214-689-0000

Management

- Positioning is important.
 - Sitting up and leaning forward, such as over a table, or leaning forward with hands on knees can help you breathe easier.
 - Elevate the head on pillows when lying in bed.
- Use the pursed lip breathing technique.
 - Take slow, deep breaths.
 - Breathe in through your nose and then breathe out slowly while pursing or puckering your lips (as if you were going to whistle).
- Sit with a fan blowing gently across your face.
- Pace your activities.
- Use relaxation techniques such as prayer, meditation, calming music, and massage.

Treatment

- Supplemental Oxygen: _____
- Bronchodilators: _____
- Steroids: _____
- Antibiotics: _____

What should I communicate to the hospice/palliative care team?

- Shortness of breath is not relieved with current treatment recommendations or gets worse
- Excessive chest or abdomen movement when breathing
- Slight blue or gray skin color (cyanosis) usually seen around the lips, eyes, or earlobes
- Weakness or fatigue
- Noisy breathing or gasping
- Positioning that may worsen symptoms
- Anxiety/Restlessness
- Shortness of breath or Air hunger

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