Shortness of Breath

Shortness of breath may occur because you have difficulty getting air in and out of your lungs. Shortness of breath can also be called dyspnea, breathlessness or air hunger.

Signs of Shortness of Breath

Shortness of breath may occur when you are active or when you are resting. Some of the signs of shortness of breath may include:

- A restless or anxious feeling
- A feeling as though you are not getting enough air
- Tiredness
- A faster breathing rate
- Shortness of breath may also cause feelings of fear, nervousness, sadness, helplessness, anger, frustration or sadness.

There are also some things that may cause or increase feelings of shortness of breath, including:

- Anxiety
- Movement
- Exercise
- 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. While you are being treated for your shortness of breath, tell your Arbor Hospice team how you feel and if the treatments help. Some of the ways to help decrease feelings of shortness of breath include:

- Medications -- Many different types of medicines can be used to help improve shortness of breath and your doctor and hospice team may give you one or more of them to take. The type of medicine that will be suggested for you depends upon the symptoms that you are having. Ask your doctor or nurse to tell you more about the medicine you are taking.

- Oxygen Therapy -- Not everyone needs or will benefit from oxygen. Your nurse will check your breathing during each visit. If it will help, the nurse will discuss the possible need for oxygen with your doctor. They can then decide how much oxygen would be helpful.

Helpful Hints

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

- Eliminate allergens, such as smoke, dust and mold.

- Use a cool mist humidifier to increase the moisture in the room.

- Use a small fan to keep air circulating.

- Keep your room cool.

- Elevate your head with pillows or request an adjustable bed from your hospice team.

- Position yourself to help with chest expansion. Sitting upright and leaning forward helps air to move in and out of the lungs. You may also find that lying on one side more than another helps.
• Breathing through your mouth may cause dryness. Try ice chips or a cold, moist washcloth to relieve feelings of dryness of the mouth.

• Conserve energy. Rearrange your environment to reduce exertion. For example: move your phone next to where you sit or lie, move your chair or bed as close as possible to the bathroom.

• Plan activities to conserve energy. Schedule activities so that you have rest time. For example, eat first, then rest and then bathe. Also, try to conserve energy so that you can do those things you find enjoyable. For example, rest before going out.

• Minimize emotional upsets.

• Many patients find that relaxation techniques, music and visualization are helpful. Your hospice team can suggest these techniques and teach you how to use them.

• Be sure clothing around the neck and chest is loose and light weight.

• Try to identify what increases your feeling of breathlessness and let your hospice team know. They can then help you to plan activities so that you are more comfortable and so that you can breathe easier.

You may have concerns or ideas about your treatment that were not discussed here. Please feel free to contact your Arbor Hospice team any time with questions or concerns you may have about shortness of breath. We want to be responsive to your needs and concerns.