




MANAGING SHORTNESS OF BREATH

WHAT IS SHORTNESS OF BREATH?

- Difficulty in breathing
- Commonly caused by respiratory or cardiovascular conditions
- Also referred to as dyspnea

WHAT SYMPTOMS MAY BE PRESENT?

- Can't catch a breath
- Chest tightness
- Fast breathing pattern
- Lightheadedness
- Confusion
- Blue discoloration around the lips
- Anxiety
- Belly breathing (abdomen movement with each breath)

	1	Onset	Mild, noticeable to patient but not observer
	2		
	3	Mild	Mild, some difficulty, noticeable to observer
	4		
	5	Moderate	Moderate difficulty, but can continue activities
	6		
	7	Severe	Severe difficulty, patient cannot continue activities
	8		
	9	Extreme	Critical difficulty, patient symptomatic upon any movement
	10		

HOW CAN IT BE TREATED WITHOUT MEDICATION?

- Use of a circular fan
- Raise the head of the bed
- Change of position
- Relaxation techniques
- Calm environment

WHAT ARE COMMON MEDICATIONS TO TREAT SHORTNESS OF BREATH?

- Nebulized treatments or inhalers, if appropriate
- Oxygen, if available
- Morphine or other pain medications
- Lorazepam (Ativan) or other anxiety medications

WHY IS MANAGING SHORTNESS OF BREATH IMPORTANT?

Breakthrough shortness of breath may be experienced by up to 80% of hospice patients. It can be a distressing symptom for both the patient and family. It is important to get breakthrough and continuous shortness of breath managed for patients so that quality of life is not impacted.

Remember there is a Hospice of West Alabama nurse available to you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to help you manage shortness of breath or any other symptoms.