

## Shortness of Breath

People who have a serious illness may experience shortness of breath, which can feel like tightness in the chest or a sensation of breathing hard while just walking or even resting. A person experiencing shortness of breath may need to take several quick, short breaths or may have difficulty talking, especially while physically moving. Some patients with shortness of breath may not be getting enough oxygen. If you suspect this may be true for you or your loved one, please let your hospice care team know as soon as possible.

Since shortness of breath can cause anxiety for patients and caregivers, here are several helpful treatments for patients:

- **Oxygen and/or direct breathing of room air:** a patient wears a small tube or mask on their face that provides oxygen or room air through their nose or mouth while they breathe. Your hospice care team can instruct you on how to use the mask, as well as how to manage oxygen safely.
- **Medicated breathing treatments:** a patient wears a small mask over their mouth and nose that is connected to a pump that turns medicine into a mist, which the patient breathes in for 10 to 20 minutes. This treatment can help open up the lungs to make breathing easier.
- **Morphine:** Morphine and related medications can help a patient breathe more deeply and slowly. When taking morphine, make sure to follow instructions from the hospice care team so it is used safely and effectively. Depending on its form, it may be taken as a pill or with a dropper under their tongue. Keep track carefully of the dose and time of each use.

### Other suggestions

- Cool the room and open the drapes or blinds, so the room feels open and airy, and not small and confined. If possible, open windows to let in a breeze or place a fan to gently blow on the patient's face if they are comfortable with it.
- Use a cool mist vaporizer to help keep the room air from getting too dry.
- Help the patient with anxiety or worry by doing meditation, guided imagery exercises, or simply by being there to provide companionship. Being less anxious and more relaxed may help slow breathing and lessen feelings of stress that comes from experiencing shortness of breath.