










Be Prepared: Palliative Care Emergencies in the Home

A Tool for Patients and Caregivers



This tool helps you know the actions you can take and reassuring words to use if your loved one is having difficulty breathing. Your healthcare provider will review the actions with you.

Actions you can take	Comforting Words
Use a fan Try directing a fan towards the face or cheek for relief. 	<i>"Let's turn on the fan and see if it helps. Can you tell me if it improves your breathing?"</i>
Change positions Recommend changing positions (45 degrees).  	<i>"It looks like you are struggling to breathe. Can I gently lean you forward to see if it helps?"</i>
Breathing techniques Try breathing through pursed lips. 	<i>"Let's try this breathing technique together. First take a normal breath in. Now, bring your lips together like you are blowing out a candle and breath out. Let's keep repeating that pattern and see if it helps."</i>
Stay calm Be present and help manage stress—focus on deep breathing. 	<i>"Take a deep breath through your nose, letting your belly expand. Now exhale, pulling your belly in, and breathe out through your mouth." Consider saying, "I'm here with you" or "Let's breathe together" rather than telling them, "Please calm down" or "Don't worry".</i>
Airflow Ensure proper ventilation of the room and consider eliminating "irritants" (e.g., cigarette smoke). Ask them if there is anything in the air that might be bothering their breathing (e.g., smoke, dust, smells, etc.).  	<i>"Sometimes things in the air can affect your breathing. Let me open the window (or turn on the fan) to see if that helps."</i>
Give medication (If prescribed) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MEDICATION – administer dosage (only if you were shown how to do so) • OXYGEN - Put on the oxygen mask or nose cannula <small>Note: Masks and/or nasal cannulas may cause skin irritation (e.g., redness) or can dry out the inside of the nose and mouth. Monitor pressure points and try padding the skin with gauze for comfort and to prevent skin breakdown. A humidifier can also be helpful.</small>  	<i>"This medication will help you breathe easier. The nurse has shown me how to administer it."</i> <i>"Let me check your oxygen mask. I want to see if it's irritating your skin or drying out your mouth/nose. It's important that this is comfortable for you."</i>

IF:

- ✓ you feel overwhelmed and need help.
- ✓ you feel your loved one is not feeling better after trying different strategies.
- ✓ you are worried about symptoms.
- ✓ you have questions about what to do.



Call your Healthcare Team

Day time: _____

Evening: _____

Night time: _____

5 things you should know about Dyspnea



1 What is Dyspnea (shortness of breath)?

Dyspnea is when someone has trouble breathing.

Imagine feeling like you are out of breath and there's a sharp tightness in your chest. It can feel as if you're gasping for air, battling for each breath, or on the verge of suffocation.

2 What causes someone to experience shortness of breath?

Shortness of breath can happen when the body doesn't get enough oxygen. For someone with a serious illness, this might be due to reasons like a worsening heart condition, fluid build-up in the lungs, tumours pressing on the airways, or infections like pneumonia. Emotions, such as stress or anxiety, can also raise breathing rates.

3 What signs should I look for?

Watch for these signs if you think someone is having trouble breathing:

- Taking quick, short breaths or gasping for air.
- Breathing faster than usual.
- Making a wheezing or loud noise when breathing.
- Making a grunting sound when breathing out.
- Their nose opens wide, or their chest pulls in below the neck or under the chest bone with each breath.
- Lips, mouth area, fingernails, or skin turning a different colour.
- Sweating a lot and looking worried or scared.

Sometimes it's hard to tell if someone is having trouble breathing. They might look like they can't catch their breath, but they feel okay, or they might seem okay but feel out of breath. Always ask them how they feel.

4 How can we treat shortness of breath?

When someone has trouble breathing, there are several ways to help.

Medicines can ease pain, improve breathing, and reduce anxiety. If someone isn't getting enough air, they might need a prescription for oxygen. In emergencies, a combination of medicines can provide quick relief.

It's vital to understand that anxiety can worsen breathing problems, so staying calm is very important.

5 When should I call the healthcare team?

In any of these situations, you should call your healthcare team immediately for guidance and assistance.

- **Sudden breathlessness:** If the person starts having a really hard time breathing out of nowhere, and it's much worse than before.
- **Increased pain:** If the person has new chest pain or if the pain gets worse when they're short of breath.
- **Change in behaviour:** If the person seems very sleepy, is hard to wake up, or acts confused when they have trouble breathing.
- **Blue or grey lips or nails:** If their lips or nails change to a blue or grey colour because they're not getting enough air.
- **Medicines not working:** If the things that usually help them breathe aren't working or if they keep having trouble breathing even after taking them.