

## Shortness of Breath (Dyspnea)

Shortness of breath is the feeling that you can't catch your breath or get enough air. It is also known as dyspnea.

Dyspnea can be caused by many different conditions. They include:

- Acute asthma attack
- Worsening of chronic lung diseases such as chronic bronchitis and emphysema
- Heart failure. This is when weak heart muscle allows extra fluid to collect in the lungs.
- Panic attacks or anxiety. Fear can cause rapid breathing (hyperventilation).
- Pneumonia, or an infection in the lung tissue
- Exposure to toxic substances, fumes, smoke, or certain medicines
- Blood clot in the lung (pulmonary embolism). This is often from a piece of blood clot in a deep vein of the leg (deep vein thrombosis) that breaks off and travels to the lungs.
- Heart attack or heart-related chest pain (angina)
- Anemia
- Collapsed lung (pneumothorax)
- Dehydration
- Pregnancy

Based on your visit today, the exact cause of your shortness of breath is not certain. Your tests don't show any of the serious causes of dyspnea. You may need other tests to find out if you have a serious problem. It's important to watch for any new symptoms or symptoms that get worse. Follow up with your healthcare provider as directed.

### Home care

Follow these tips to take care of yourself at home:

- When your symptoms are better, go back to your usual activities.
- If you smoke, you should stop. Join a quit-smoking program or ask your healthcare provider for help.
- Eat a healthy diet and get plenty of sleep.
- Get regular exercise. Talk with your healthcare provider before starting to exercise, especially if you have other medical problems.
- Cut down on the amount of caffeine and stimulants you consume.

## Follow-up care

Follow up with your healthcare provider, or as advised.

If tests were done, you will be told if your treatment needs to be changed. You can call as directed for the results.

If an X-ray was taken, a specialist will review it. You will be notified of any new findings that may affect your care.

## Call 911

Shortness of breath may be a sign of a serious medical problem. For example, it may be a problem with your heart or lungs. Call 911 if you have worsening shortness of breath or trouble breathing, especially with any of the symptoms below:

- You are confused or it's difficult to wake you.
- You faint or lose consciousness.
- You have a fast heartbeat, or your heartbeat is irregular.
- You are coughing up blood.
- You have pain in your chest, arm, shoulder, neck, or upper back.
- You break out in a sweat.

## When to seek medical advice

Call your healthcare provider right away if any of these occur:

- Slight shortness of breath or wheezing
- Redness, pain or swelling in your leg, arm, or other body area
- Swelling in both legs or ankles
- Fast weight gain
- Dizziness or weakness
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider