



"Lighting the way with better patient care."

**Anova**  
HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Home Health · Hospice · Palliative · Home Care

## HOSPICE PATIENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### TIPS FOR SHORTNESS OF BREATH

Shortness of breath, or dyspnea, is one of the most commonly seen symptoms in people with advanced disease, and can really impact a person's quality of life. It is a subjective feeling (meaning the patient is able to describe how distressing the symptom is in words), like pain, and patients can become very frightened and anxious, which may make the symptoms worse.

#### Signs and Symptoms

- Breathing fast
- Feeling "winded" or unable to speak in full sentences
- Sitting with hands on knees, or on the side of the bed, leaning over bedside table
- Using neck, shoulder, chest, and abdominal muscles to breathe
- Lips and nail beds may be bluish in color and extremities may be mottled

#### What you can do for the patient:

- Positioning is important. Many patients find that sitting up and leaning forward over a table or with hands on knees helps.
- Pursed lip breathing helps slow down the rate of breathing
- Have the patient sit near a window, or have a fan blow on them so they feel like they are getting "more air"
- Teach relaxation techniques to help patients calm down
- Your own attitude has an effect on the patient and family, so remain calm, friendly, empathetic, and provide support and information
- Don't leave the patient alone when he/she is experiencing shortness of breath that is distressing
- If the patient is blue (gray or dusky) in the face, cannot speak more than 2 words between breaths, gets confused, dizzy weak, or starts wheezing, contact the nurse
- If the patient is on oxygen, ensure equipment is connected, working properly, and that oxygen safety has been reviewed

**Anova Health Care System**

**Tel:** (412) 681-1044 **Fax:** (412) 681-8380

**Email:** [info@anovahomehealth.com](mailto:info@anovahomehealth.com)

**Website:** [www.AnovaHomeHealth.com](http://www.AnovaHomeHealth.com)