

Trouble Breathing in the Home

Trouble breathing, or shortness of breath, is a fairly common symptom in hospice patients. Tell your hospice team if the patient is experiencing any degree of trouble breathing.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- There are simple things you can do to help:
 - First, make sure the patient is sitting up straight if they can. Leaning forward can help.
 - Use pursed lip breathing: keeping the patients lips closed except for small opening and breath out. It will help slow their breathing.
 - Place a fan in front of the patient blowing in their face.
 - Keep the patient's line of sight on an open space like a window.
 - Relaxation or meditation can help relax the patient.

- If the patient is coughing, a medication that helps them cough may be given because often it's important to get rid of secretions, but sometimes a medication to suppress the cough can be given.
- Excess fluid in the lungs can be treated with *Furosemide* to get rid of that fluid.
- Antibiotics may be given.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Oxygen may help the patient to breathe easier. It only helps if the patient's blood levels of oxygen are decreased, usually exhibited by fast and rapid breathing. If these symptoms are not present, increasing oxygen may not help.
- Many different medications may help the patient's comfort. In each case, these medications may be different because of the cause of your loved one's trouble breathing.
- Low dose *Morphine* works by slowing down breathing, decreasing secretions, opening up the airways, and improving mental state.
- Other medications may be used instead (*Oxycodone, Hydromorphone, etc.*)
- Medications such as lorazepam (Ativan) can decrease trouble breathing and anxiety that often go hand in hand.
- Other types of medication may be used.
- *Albuterol* or *Ipratropium* is usually given by using a nebulizer and can open, relax and widen the airways.
- Steroids can be given by inhaler or by mouth (pill) to reduce inflammation and decrease mucous production.



CALL THE HOSPICE TEAM IF:

- Trouble breathing is not any better with the current medications or treatments.
- Trouble breathing is increasing or getting more frequent.
- Frequent or increased nonverbal signs of pain.
- New, sudden pain.
- There are any changes, so we can plan interventions for optimal care.

Need Support?

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