

Caregiver Care Guide:

Trouble with Breathing

What is Trouble with Breathing?

Trouble with Breathing, Shortness of Breath, Breathing Problems or Dyspnea is the uncomfortable feeling of having difficulty breathing.

What are some Symptoms of Trouble with Breathing?

- Feeling unable to “Catch my breath”
- Rapid breathing
- “Not getting enough air”
- Shallow breathing
- Feeling like “suffocating”
- Pauses between breaths
- Feeling like the “room is closing in”
- Fear or anxiety
- Congestion or “rattling in chest”

What can be done to Manage Trouble with Breathing?

- Use medications and oxygen as instructed by the care team
- Treat other concerns that may be causing trouble with breathing, such as anxiety or pain
- Control secretions through coughing and deep breathing; stay hydrated
- Focus on breathing technique by taking slow, deep breaths or using breathing exercises
 - **Exercise One:** Breathe in through the nose for two counts, pucker lips and exhale slowly through the mouth
 - **Exercise Two:** Sit in a comfortable position with hands resting on stomach. Inhale slowly through the nose and feel the stomach muscle relax. Then, tighten the stomach muscle and exhale slowly through pursed lips.
- Increase air movement in the room by using windows or fans
- Fan the face
- Avoid environmental allergens, smoke and pollution
- A cooler room often helps
- Keep cool by applying cool washcloths to the face
- Provide calm, quiet reassurance through presence
- Elevate the head; sometimes leaning forward resting elbows on table can help
- Conserve energy, plan activities that will decrease exertion

What are some of the Side Effects of Trouble with Breathing?

- Sleepiness from certain medications
- Tremors, nervousness or increased heart rate from certain medications

*If **Trouble with Breathing** is not managed or medication side effects do not improve, notify the hospice team.*