

# Tips for Managing Shortness of Breath



## Things you can do on your own

### Get comfortable.

- Sit upright or in a reclined position with your feet on a footrest. Don't slouch.
- Lie down with your head propped up on several pillows, or lie down in a reclining chair, never flat.
- Try pursed-lip breathing.
  - Breathe in through your nose for 2 counts.
  - Breathe out through your pursed (whistle-shaped) lips for 4 counts.
- Rest as much as you need.

### Get fresh air.

- Avoid dust, fragrances, smoke, and pollution.
- Avoid extreme temperatures.
- Try sitting near a fan.



## With the help of your care team

### Ask your care team for a prescription medication or treatment to help you breathe better, such as:

- Oxygen
- Inhalers
- Nebulizers
- Medications that can help with severe shortness of breath, like morphine or lorazepam (Ativan)
- Treatment for anemia
- Diuretics (like Lasix)



## When to call your care team for help

**Your care team takes shortness of breath very seriously. Always call them if you have:**

- New shortness of breath
- Shortness of breath that is worsening
- Blue or pale-looking skin, mouth, or nails
- A preexisting deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or blood clot/clotting disorder
- Symptoms of leg or arm swelling (with or without pain) in addition to shortness of breath
  - Leg or arm swelling can be a sign of a blood clot, which has a very serious side effect of causing shortness of breath (pulmonary embolism). Risk of blood clots increase after surgery, especially with long periods of being in bed. You may need a test to determine if there is a blood clot.
- Chest pain
- A new irregular heartbeat
- A new fast heartbeat
- Anxiety with shortness of breath



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at [cancer.org/shortness-of-breath](https://cancer.org/shortness-of-breath) or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.