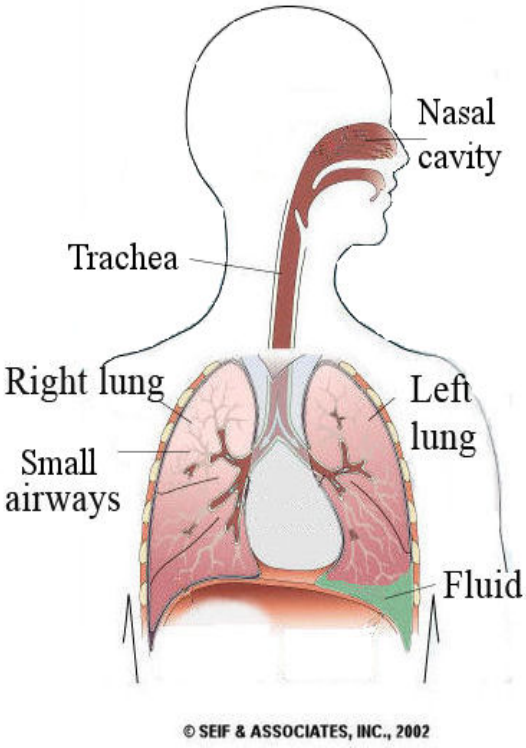
Shortness of Breath

Shortness of breath (*dyspnea*) is the feeling of uneasy breathing. It does not always mean that there is a life threatening illness. Dyspnea needs care right away.

HOME CARE

- **Do not smoke**. This is a common cause of shortness of breath.
- Avoid being around chemicals that may bother your breathing (paint fumes, dust, etc).
- Rest as needed. Slowly begin your usual activities.
- **Take medicine as directed by your doctor.** Inhaled medicines and/or oxygen might be part of your treatment.
- Follow up with your doctor as directed. Waiting to do so or failure to follow up could result in worsening your condition and possible disability or death.
- Be sure you understand what to do or who to call if your shortness of breath worsens.



LET YOUR DOCTOR KNOW IF:

- Anyone in your family has breathing trouble.
- This has happened before. If so:
  - What were you doing?
  - What time of day was it?
  - Where were you?
  - What did you do to make it better?
  - How long did it last?
- You have been sick in the past month.
- You have been in an accident or been hurt.
- You sometimes feel like your heart is racing.
- Coughing wakes you up or makes it hard to sleep.

GET HELP IF:

- You are not breathing better when you stop and rest.
- Your condition does not improve in the time expected.
- You have problems with medications prescribed.

GET HELP RIGHT AWAY IF:

- You get pain in your chest, shoulders, belly or jaw.
- You cannot stop coughing or start wheezing.
- You cough up blood.
- You are scared and can only speak with short words.
- You start coughing up blood or thick mucus.
- You have a fever.
- You feel your heart racing or skipping beats.

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