Shortness of Breath
(No Apparent Cause)

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

DIAGNOSIS

Many tests may be done to find why you are having shortness of breath. Tests include:

- Chest x-rays.
- Lung function tests.
- Blood tests.
- Electrocardiogram.
- Exercise testing.
- A cardiac echo.
- Scans.

Serious medical problems will usually be found during your exam.

Your caregiver may not be able to find a cause for your shortness of breath after looking at you. In this case, it is important to have a follow-up and exam with your caregiver after a period of time.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- **Do not smoke**. Smoking is a common cause of shortness of breath. Ask for help to stop smoking.
- Avoid being around chemicals that may bother your breathing (paint fumes, dust, etc)
- Rest as needed. Slowly begin your usual activities.
- If medications were prescribed, take them as directed for the full length of time directed. This includes oxygen and any inhaled medications, if prescribed.
- It is very important that you follow up with your caregiver or other physician as directed. Waiting to do so or failure to follow-up could result in worsening of your condition and possible disability or death.
- Be sure you understand what to do or who to call if your shortness of breath worsens.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your condition does not improve in the time expected.
- You have a hard time doing your normal activities even with rest.
- You have any side effects from or problems with medications prescribed.
- You develop any new symptoms not discussed below.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You feel your shortness of breath is getting worse.
- You feel lightheaded, faint or develop a cough not controlled with medications.
- You start coughing up blood.
- You get pain with breathing.
- You get chest pain or pain in your arms, shoulders or belly (*abdomen*).
- You develop an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), after not having a temperature for one or more days.
- You are unable to walk up stairs or exercise the way you normally can.
- If any of the symptoms, which brought you into the emergency room before, are getting worse and not better.

Document Released: 04/07/2004 Document Re-Released: 06/05/2009
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.