

Causes of Shortness of Breath

Terminally ill patients often experience shortness of breath during their time in hospice care. Shortness of breath is often a symptom of underlying diseases such as lung cancer or COPD. In other cases, it can be caused by pneumonia, or an infection in the lungs.

Medical Treatments

- Oxygen treatment is often the first option for helping relieve shortness of breath in hospice care.
- If shortness of breath is caused by an underlying disease (cancer/COPD), medications used to reduce inflammation or improve lung function can help. These can include:
 - Albuterol (Ventolin®)
 - Levalbuterol (Xopenex®)
 - Ipratropium (Atrovent®)
 - Oral Steroids Examples: Prednisone or Dexamethasone
- In cases where shortness of breath is caused by an infection in the lungs (pneumonia), treatment with antibiotics can be helpful.
- Anxiety can increase you or your loved one's breathing rate, so using medications that help control anxiety can help, also. These can include:
 - Alprazolam *
 - Lorazepam *
- Morphine is another medication that is often used to help reduce shortness of breath because it relaxes blood vessels and helps to reduce the breathing rate.

Non-Medical Treatments

- Keeping the room at or below room temperature, or opening a window if the outside temperature permits
- Using a humidifier in the room
- Positioning a fan blowing cool air towards yourself or your loved one
- Relaxing by any means possible (meditation, relaxing music, massage therapy)

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