

Understanding Trouble Breathing

- What is trouble breathing?
 - Shortness of breath
 - Breathing hard or breathing fast
 - Having feelings of breathlessness
- Trouble breathing can happen with movement and also when resting.
- Some causes of trouble breathing are:
 - Anxiety or fear
 - Illness progression
 - Weakness
- When there is a terminal illness, sometimes there are multiple reasons for trouble breathing.
- Hospice utilizes medications and non-medication interventions to help reduce the feeling of trouble breathing.

Reasons to Contact Hospice

- Breathing is worse than normal.
- Breathing pattern has changed.
- Medications for trouble breathing are not working or not working as well as they have in the past.
- There are questions about medications for trouble breathing.
- There is anxiety about trouble breathing.
- Increased congestion.
- New fever.

**If symptoms are not managed or you have any questions, please contact your
Confluence Health Home Care Services Hospice Team: (509) 433-3700**

Interventions to Reduce Trouble Breathing

- Use pursed lip breathing for when you are having trouble breathing or breathing fast.
 - This helps slow breathing and save energy
- Keep the temperature in the room cool.
- Use a fan to help circulate the air.
- Keep the environment calm.
- Explore relaxation methods such as listening to music, aromatherapy, and gentle massage.
- Sitting upright can help increase air movement.
- Take your medications as prescribed.
- Take frequent breaks when walking.
- Conserve and save your energy to do things that matter most.
- Keep fireplace smoke and dust out of your area as much as possible.

Some Common Medications

- Short acting medications that help open the airway that are used for quick relief if needed (inhaler or nebulizer).
 - Albuterol (Proair, Ventolin)
 - Levalbuterol (Xopenex)
 - Ipratropium (Atrovent)
 - Albuterol/ipratropium (Combivent Respimat)
- Medications that reduce inflammation (swelling) and make air flow easier (inhaler or nebulizer).
 - Fluticasone (Flovent)
 - Budesonide (Pulmicort)
 - Prednisone (oral tablet)
- Short acting anxiety medications (example: lorazepam) can help calm anxiety related to trouble breathing.
- Opioids (examples: morphine, oxycodone, etc.) can help with trouble breathing. These medications can help calm breathing.
- Oxygen is helpful only in certain cases, this depends on the disease process.
- If there is congestion present, the hospice team will help determine if medications would be helpful for managing them.

**If symptoms are not managed or you have any questions, please contact your
Confluence Health Home Care Services Hospice Team: (509) 433-3700**

Other Information on Trouble Breathing

- Problems with breathing can cause depression and anxiety. Make sure to report if you feel 'blue' most of the time or anxious to your provider.
- Tips for eating:
 - Drinking water helps keep you hydrated and your mucous thin.
 - If you tire easy, try resting before eating.
 - Eat more food early if you are too tired to eat later in the day.
 - Eat 4 to 6 small meals a day that are high in protein.
- If there is trouble breathing during walking and performing daily tasks, ask for help when needed to reduce risk of injury or falling.

Breathing During the Final Hours to Days

- During the last hours to days of life, breathing patterns change. This is a normal part of the process and does not always mean that there is trouble breathing. The hospice team will make sure that medications are used for comfort and review the normal process of the breathing changes.
 - Breathing patterns may switch between fast and slow and have occasional pauses.
- During this time, there might be sounds of congestion. Congestion from secretions can be a normal part of the changes the body is experiencing.
 - There is weakness, and the body is unable to cough or clear secretions.
 - The secretions are near the voice box in the throat and when air moves over the secretions, it makes a noisy, congested sound.
 - These sounds can be disturbing to loved ones, but if the body and face are relaxed then the congestion is not known to be bothersome to the one experiencing it.

**If symptoms are not managed or you have any questions, please contact your
Confluence Health Home Care Services Hospice Team: (509) 433-3700**