

Shortness of Breath, Adult

Shortness of breath is when a person has trouble breathing enough air or when a person feels like she or he is having trouble breathing in enough air. Shortness of breath could be a sign of a medical problem.

Follow these instructions at home:

- Pay attention to any changes in your symptoms.
- **Do not** use any products that contain nicotine or tobacco, such as cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and chewing tobacco.
- **Do not** smoke. Smoking is a common cause of shortness of breath. If you need help quitting, ask your health care provider.
- Avoid things that can irritate your airways, such as:
 - Mold.
 - Dust.
 - Air pollution.
 - Chemical fumes.
 - Things that can cause allergy symptoms (*allergens*), if you have allergies.
- Keep your living space clean and free of mold and dust.
- Rest as needed. Slowly return to your usual activities.
- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider. This includes oxygen therapy and inhaled medicines.
- Keep all follow-up visits as told by your health care provider. This is important.



Contact a health care provider if:

- Your condition does not improve as soon as expected.
- You have a hard time doing your normal activities, even after you rest.
- You have new symptoms.

Get help right away if:

- Your shortness of breath gets worse.
- You have shortness of breath when you are resting.
- You feel light-headed or you faint.
- You have a cough that is not controlled with medicines.
- You cough up blood.
- You have pain with breathing.
- You have pain in your chest, arms, shoulders, or abdomen.
- You have a fever.
- You cannot walk up stairs or exercise the way that you normally do.

These symptoms may represent a serious problem that is an emergency. Do not wait to see if the symptoms will go away. Get medical help right away. Call your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.). Do not drive yourself to the hospital.

Summary

- Shortness of breath is when a person has trouble breathing enough air. It can be a sign of a medical problem.
- Avoid things that irritate your lungs, such as smoking, pollution, mold, and dust.
- Pay attention to changes in your symptoms and contact your health care provider if you have a hard time completing daily activities because of shortness of breath.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.