

# SHORTNESS OF BREATH

## WHAT IS IT?

Shortness of breath is one of the most common challenges for people in treatment for lung cancer as well as long-time survivors.

If you are currently smoking, there are resources to help you quit. Quitting will allow better air exchange in your lungs and relieve shortness of breath.

For anyone experiencing shortness of breath it is important to avoid areas with a lot of secondhand smoke.

## MEDICATIONS

- **INHALER:** A small hand-held device with medicine that is breathed in.
- **NEBULIZER:** Turns liquid medicine into a mist that is inhaled. It is used for severe or intense symptoms.
- **PAIN MEDICATIONS AND OPIOIDS:** Such as morphine in very low doses.
- **ANTI-ANXIETY MEDICATIONS:** Manages anxiety but does not reduce shortness of breath; e.g. lorazepam.
- **OXYGEN:** Reduces shortness of breath only if your oxygen blood level is low.

## RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

- Deep breathing
- Meditation
- Guided imagery, using words and music that have a connection to positive scenarios
- Relaxing exercises like yoga and Tai Chi
- Acupuncture/Acupressure

**MOVE** Moving your body to certain positions can open airways, making it easier to breathe.

**USE** Using a hand held fan stimulates facial nerves and can change your feeling of breathlessness.

**CONSERVE** Conserving energy helps use the oxygen you do have in your body more wisely.

**EXERCISE** Exercise in formal programs like Pulmonary Rehabilitation or on your own at home.

*We gratefully acknowledge Donna Wilson, RN, MSN, RRT/Personal Trainer and Lynn Reinke, PhD, ARNP, FAAN for offering their knowledge to help our community.*



**LUNG CANCER ALLIANCE**

1-800-298-2436 | [lungcanceralliance.org](http://lungcanceralliance.org)

# MANAGE SHORTNESS OF BREATH

- 1** Sit down or lean against a wall.
- 2** Place your chin to your chest.
- 3** Blow quick, short bursts of air through your lips 10 times in a row. Neck and chest muscles relax.
- 4** Keep your chin down and breathe in through your nose and out through your lips. Repeat two times.
- 5** Keeping your mouth closed, breathe in and out through your nose with your chin down. Repeat three times.
- 6** Lift your head up, keep shoulders down and breathe normally (in through your nose and out through your lips).

## TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Repeat the following steps three times.



Breathe in through your nose and count to four



Hold breath for four counts



Blow out slowly through pursed lips for a count of eight



## CLIMBING STAIRS

**STEP 1:** Place one foot on the first step. Breathe out through your mouth as you bring your body and second foot up to this step.

**STEP 2:** Place the next foot on the next step. Breathe out through your mouth as you bring your body up to the step. Continue.

**STEP 3:** Place one foot on a step, breathing out. Place the second foot on the next step, breathing out as each foot lands on a step.

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