



Information Sheet

Dyspnea and Terminal Respiratory Congestion

Dyspnea, commonly referred to as shortness of breath, occurs when the body cannot get enough oxygen. It can be very anxiety producing both for the person experiencing it and for the carers.

In Dyspnea, you will notice a blueish tinge to the skin around the mouth and the nail beds. The person may be making gurgling sounds when he/she breathes.

Care for a person with Dyspnea:

- Positioning – raising head of bed
- Fan to keep air moving
- Window/door open
- Limit people in environment
- Cool, moist towel
- Conserve energy when doing ADLs
- Oxygen mask or cannula
- Prevent skin irritation from elastic/tube
- Document observations
- Communicate with team

Terminal Respiratory Congestion

Someone who is suffering from an illness that affects their respiratory system can experience something called **Air Hunger**. This is quite a distressing symptom for the client. Air hunger can be treated with medication such as Versed that will stop the brain from feeling deprived of air and reduce the associated anxiety.

A build up of oral secretions and moisture is a very common experience in the final stages of a person's life. It **can be managed** with medication to eliminate or minimize the gurgling sound that might be upsetting to family or caregivers.

Either of these symptoms can be a natural part of the progression towards death but they can be very distressing to both the person and the caregivers. So, this treatment is not intended to prolong life but, instead, is geared toward **increasing the comfort of the family and caregivers**.

- Provide reassurance to family
- Position for comfort (on their side or with head of bed raised)
- Provide good oral and nasal care
- Document observations
- Communicate with team