

# Feeling Short of Breath

Feeling short of breath or like you can't breathe is a possible symptom of kidney disease and can be upsetting. There can be many causes: low iron levels, extra fluid in the lungs, and even being anxious. Remember that you know best how your breathing feels—you may not *look* like you're short of breath, but that doesn't mean that you don't *feel* short of breath.

## What tips can I try at home?

- Sit more upright. Using pillows to support your back may help.
- Sit near an open window.
- Sleep more upright. Sleeping in a recliner may help.
- Have a fan blow gently across your face.
- Keep the air humidified.
- Try “pursed lip” breathing—ask your care provider to show you. If it doesn't feel natural or it doesn't help, don't do it.
- Wear loose clothing, especially around your neck.
- If you take medicine for your breathing, try taking it before doing an activity that makes you feel short of breath.
- Rest often between activities that make you feel short of breath (for example, walking, washing, dressing, or talking).
- Keep surroundings as calm as possible—especially if you're feeling anxious.
- Try meditation, mindfulness, or relaxation therapy.

## What are some relaxation techniques?

Some of your healthcare providers may be able to teach you relaxation techniques or you can learn some on your own. Some techniques include:

- progressive muscle relaxation (focus on slowly tensing and then relaxing each muscle group)
- visualization (form mental images to take a visual journey to a peaceful, calming place or situation)
- music and art therapy

## **What treatment choices do I have?**

Talk to your care provider if shortness of breath is still a problem for you. You may need medicine, including oxygen, if your oxygen level is low.

Following a low-salt diet may help your breathing too, because salt affects the amount of fluid in your body. Too much fluid in your body can lead to shortness of breath. If you need more help with this, you could ask to speak with a dietitian.

Sometimes when you're very short of breath, it can feel like an emergency. Plan ahead and have a list of who you can phone and what medicine (including oxygen) you can take to help your breathing.

If you have homecare, they may be able to help you with your shortness of breath at home. Be sure that you or your family always let the nurse, doctor or healthcare team know if you are experiencing feeling short of breath or if your symptoms are getting worse.