



Breathlessness (Dyspnoea)

What is it?

Breathlessness is shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing. Breathlessness can happen for a number of reasons, including:

- Lung conditions such as asthma or COPD
- Heart conditions
- Anxiety
- Lung cancer
- Obesity
- Other health conditions such as anaemia, kidney or thyroid problems

Managing your breathlessness depends on what is causing it. It is often linked to a health condition but can be a result of pregnancy, a hard workout, being at a high altitude, wearing tight clothes or not moving around for long periods of time.

What will my GP do now?

Your GP will assess your health and history to find the cause of your symptoms. Your GP will talk to you about your lifestyle habits. Your GP may also arrange for more tests to get a better idea of why you might feel this way. Depending on the results of these tests, your GP may ask you to take more tests or will let you know how to treat your symptoms.

Your GP may talk to you about completing a [Shortness of Breath Action Plan](#). This will help you and those around you to manage your breathlessness.

What will my GP do in the future?

Your GP may see you often to check your symptoms and see if you are feeling better. If you still have shortness of breath after your treatment, your GP may refer you to a specialist.

What can I do?

Follow your GP's advice and keep your Shortness of Breath Action Plan handy at all times. Living a healthy lifestyle will help you stay well. Eat a diet with plenty of fresh fruits, veggies and whole grains. Limit drinking alcohol and quit smoking. Maintain a healthy weight, get eight hours of sleep each night and reduce stress.

Other things you can do to manage your breathlessness include learning different breathing techniques and moving into positions which will help you regain control of your breathing.

If your symptoms don't seem to be getting better, see your GP.

When should I call an ambulance?



If you or someone you know is experiencing severe or rapid breathing, shortness of breath, pain when breathing or confusion, phone Triple 0 (000).

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What supports are available?

Public hospitals

Your GP can refer you to a public lung specialist or Respiratory and Sleep Clinic at a local public hospital.

Private specialists

Private specialists, called pulmonologists, are also an option. Ask your GP to refer you.

What questions could I ask my doctor?

What should I do if I am struggling to breathe?

Will medication help?

How can I stop feeling this way?

What can I do to improve my health?



Where can I learn more?

- Lung Foundation Australia – Breathlessness: lungfoundation.com.au
- Cancer Council NSW – Breathlessness: cancer council.com.au

This information is to be viewed by someone who has received a diagnosis from their doctor. It is not designed to be used to diagnose a condition or as a substitute for ongoing medical care

Health Resource Directory factsheets are endorsed by South Western Sydney PHN's Community Advisory Committee and local GPs

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