

Information Sheet:

Cancer Treatment & Shortness of Breath

Shortness of breath is the feeling of having trouble breathing. This is because the body is working hard to move air in and out of the lungs. Shortness of breath may be caused or worsened by:

- ❖ Some chemotherapy drugs or radiation therapy to the lungs;
- ❖ Reduced oxygen in the blood (anaemia);
- ❖ Infection;
- ❖ Fluid in the lungs;
- ❖ Lung damage from smoking;
- ❖ Cancer that has affected the lungs;
- ❖ Asthma or any other chronic lung problems.

Feeling short of breath can make you feel anxious. Anxiety can worsen the feeling of breathlessness.

What can I do to manage my shortness of breath?

- ❖ Planning your activities may help you feel more in control of your breathing. Work out which activities make your breathing worse and plan to lessen those activities (e.g. climbing stairs).
- ❖ Ask family and friends for help with activities that make you feel short of breath.
- ❖ Take note of actions that you carry out to help you recover from attacks of breathlessness such as controlled breathing or relaxation. Practise them when you are not feeling too breathless. This will increase your confidence to use these actions when you are feeling very short of breath.
- ❖ Work out what times of day you feel you have the most energy and plan activities around these times. Rest between activities.
- ❖ Plan the best way to carry out an activity. For example, sit to put on your socks and shoes and bring your feet up rather than bending over, as this may make you feel more short of breath. If you feel short of breath in the shower, try to make sure that the water is not spraying directly onto your face. Sit in the shower to conserve energy. If you prefer a bath, try sitting on the side of the bath and lifting one leg in at a time, rather than climbing in. Use a robe to dry yourself, rather than drying yourself with a towel.

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- ❖ A good way to help expand your lungs is to sit upright in a chair, lean forward slightly and rest your forearms on the arms of the chair or another piece of furniture, or on your knees.
- ❖ You may find sleeping with your head on several pillows or sitting up in a recliner chair helpful.
- ❖ Try controlled breathing. This slows the flow of air in and out of your lungs. To do this:
 - breathe in through your nose (or mouth if you can't breathe in through your nose), as you normally would, then;
 - breathe out for twice as long as you breathe in. Keep your lips tightly together, except for the very centre. Blow out through this small opening.
 - when you do this, try to relax your shoulders.
- ❖ Improve air circulation by opening a window or turning on a fan.
- ❖ Be aware that things like cold air, strong winds, humidity, pollen and tobacco smoke may all make your breathlessness worse.
- ❖ Ask your nurse/doctor about relaxation and meditation. Using these can help you control your breathing and may reduce any panic attacks you may experience when very short of breath.

Tell your Doctor or Nurse if:

- Notice a worsening in your breathing or you suddenly become extremely short of breath
- Can't find relief from the measures explained in this flyer

We encourage you to speak with your healthcare team if you have any concerns about your shortness of breath.

We welcome feedback at:

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Bairnsdale Regional Health Service is located on the traditional land of the Gunai Kurnai people.

My team is **BRHS**