ST. FRANCIS 24/7 CALL CENTER: (321) 269-4240

St. Francis REFLECTIONS® Hospice
Established 1977 • Licensed 1990

Dyspnea

Dyspnea is a symptom, described as an uncomfortable feeling of not being able to breathe normally. Patient's may describe dyspnea of not getting enough air, not being able to 'catch their breath', or not enough air in the room. Dyspnea can be extremely distressing for both the patient and caregiver.

Common signs and symptoms to monitor for:

- Rapid or shallow breathing
- Gasping or wheezing
- Use of neck or chest, or abdominal muscles to breathe
- Panic or anxiety
- Blue-tinged lips or fingers (cyanosis)
- Patient reported shortness of breath

Tips for Dyspnea Management:

- **Positioning**: Elevate the head of the bed or use pillows to prop up the patient. Sitting in a chair or recliner can also help. Keep the patient in a position that is comfortable and makes breathing easier.
- **Oxygen Therapy**: If prescribed, use oxygen as directed. Adjust the flow rate according to the doctor's instructions. Ensure the oxygen equipment is clean and functioning properly. **When oxygen in use, avoid any open flames, never allow smoking and ensure tubing is not kinked.**
- **Air Circulation**: Use a fan to provide a gentle breeze, which can create the sensation of easier breathing. Opening a window for fresh air can also help.
- **Calm Environment**: Reduce anxiety by maintaining a calm atmosphere. Remain calm and reassuring, use soothing voices and provide reassurance. Teach the patient to take slow, deep breaths to reduce panic.

- **Medications**: Use prescribed medications like bronchodilators or opioids to ease breathing. These can help relax the airways and reduce the sensation of breathlessness.
- **Pursed Lip Breathing**: A technique of taking slow, deep breaths, breathing in through the nose and then breathing out slowly and gently through puckered (as if whistling) lips.

Record and Report to St. Francis:

- Changes in breathing patterns
- Breathing problems that continue or worsen
- New or worsening cough
- Difficulty completing tasks due to shortness of breath

St. Francis Reflections is always available to assist with any questions or concerns 24/7

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