

# Shortness of Breath



Réseau de  
cancérologie  
Rossy

Rossy  
Cancer  
Network

## Symptom Management Tip Sheet

### Let's talk about shortness of breath...



- This can include any breathing problem such as difficulty breathing, tightness in the chest, inability to catch your breath, and anxiety.
- Sometimes shortness of breath can happen if you feel anxious (see Anxiety Tip Sheet).
- If your shortness of breath is new or worse than before, please contact your health care team.
- If you are also coughing, or have trouble talking, or cannot lie down, **GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM.**
- If you are very short of breath, have chest pain or are panting/gasping **CALL 9-1-1 IMMEDIATELY.**
- If you have shortness of breath and a fever (temperature greater than 38°C), **CONTACT YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM IMMEDIATELY.**

*\* If you are undergoing IMMUNOTHERAPY and have these symptoms please contact your healthcare team as soon as possible. Delays can increase side effects and toxicity.*



### What you can do

- When resting, try to sit upright.
- Try increasing air flow to your face by using a fan, open window or humidifier.
- Turn down the temperature in your house.
- Try different relaxation and breathing exercises (e.g. pursed lip breathing).
- Conserve your energy (balance activity with rest) or use support devices (e.g. wheelchair).
- Try to do physical activity (e.g. walking 15-30 min.) at least twice a week when your breathing is normal.

Based on: Remote Symptom Practice Guides for Adults on Cancer Treatments  
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### Support alternatives

Seek supportive counselling or try a program such as cognitive behavioral therapy.

*This information should not be considered as medical advice. It is not to be used in place of a visit with a doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional. If you have questions about your individual medical situation, please consult with your healthcare professional.*

### Other resources

#### Managing Shortness of Breath

<https://bit.ly/ccco-breath>

#### Causes and Treatments

<https://bit.ly/bccancer-breath>

#### Lung Cancer Canada

<https://www.lungcancercanada.ca>

#### Managing Breathlessness (video)

<https://bit.ly/youtube-breath>

#### More resources at

[mcgill.ca/rcr-rcn/patient](http://mcgill.ca/rcr-rcn/patient)

### Who can help



#### Nurse Navigator (IPO)

If you have one, please speak with your IPO

### If you are getting treatment at:

#### ▪ Oncology Clinic, call:

Symptom Management Hotline

514-340-8222 ext. 25529

Mon – Fri. 8h00-16h00

Nights/Weekends: 514-340-8232

#### ▪ Radiation Oncology Clinic, call:

514-340-8222 ext. 24124