

# Agitation and Restlessness

Agitation is a commonly occurring symptom in someone nearing the end of life, yet it often surprises the caregiver and family when it occurs.

A loved one who is usually calm may unexpectedly and suddenly experience significant mood and behavior changes.

As with other symptoms, it is important to recognize and treat agitation early.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF AGITATION CAN INCLUDE:

- Restless and inability to be still
- Thrashing
- Anger
- Picking at clothing or bedding
- Confusion and/or paranoia
- Homework/study
- Difficulty concentrating or focusing attention
- Insomnia
- Yelling and/or striking out
- Trying to get out of bed
- Frequent requests to urinate
- Hallucinating
- Need to go somewhere, such as work or the store

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP:

- Stay calm. If you appear anxious, it could affect your loved one's behavior.
- Call the Big Bend Hospice RN. The RN will evaluate the patient for possible causes of agitation and work with you and hospice team members to treat the agitation.
- Administer prescribed anxiety medications according to medication directions if they are available.
- Stay with your loved one to help keep them safe.
- Talk soothingly to your loved one.
- Create a calm and soothing environment. This can include reducing excess noise, dimming lights, or softly playing music.
- Use lotion to gently stroke your loved one's hand or foot.
- Do not correct or contradict what your loved one says; it may increase their agitation.

## NOTES TO DISCUSS WITH THE NURSE:

The following information will be very helpful to the Big Bend Hospice RN.

- When the agitation began: \_\_\_\_\_
- What triggered, if anything, the agitation: \_\_\_\_\_
- The last time your loved one: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Urinated \_\_\_\_\_
  - Had a bowel movement \_\_\_\_\_
  - Took regularly scheduled medications \_\_\_\_\_
  - Had any food and fluid \_\_\_\_\_

Remember, Big Bend Hospice is here to support you. Call your Big Bend Hospice team if you have any questions or concerns at (850) 878-5310.

# Breathing, Shortness of Breath

Dyspnea is a medical term for difficult or troubled breathing. You may hear it referred to as shortness of breath, hard to breathe, heavy chest or not getting enough air. This feeling of having difficulty breathing can be very scary and make someone feel anxious.

There are things that can be done to help when this shortness of breath feeling occurs.

## ENVIRONMENT:

- Proper positioning by sitting upright and leaning forward slightly or standing and leaning forward slightly.
- Keep the room cool with circulating air (*use of a fan*).
- Make sure the area is calm and peaceful, allowing the person to relax.
- Stop any activity and rest.

## BREATHING ASSISTANCE:

- If oxygen is being used, is it functioning properly?
- Pursed lip breathing (smell the roses, blow out the candle).

## MEDICATIONS:

- Nebulizer treatment/inhaler.
- Anxiety medication.
- Pain medication can make it easier to breathe.

## NOTES TO DISCUSS WITH THE NURSE:

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Your Big Bend Hospice care team has identified you or your loved one as being at risk for breathing problems.

Because of this, we have requested equipment and medication to assist if you or your loved one experience shortness of breath.

Big Bend Hospice provides you with equipment, medication and education to help you manage any shortness of breath at home. After you are admitted to Big Bend Hospice, a nurse will visit to assist with training in the use of the equipment, medications and to answer any questions you may have about the program. You and your registered nurse case manager can discuss how often the nursing visits will occur to ensure that you remain comfortable in your home.



## EQUIPMENT:

### Oxygen Concentrator

An oxygen concentrator is a medical device used to deliver oxygen for conditions that cause or result in low levels of oxygen in the blood. It works much like a window air conditioning unit by:

- Taking in air from its surroundings.
- Compressing the air.
- Removing nitrogen from the air.
- Adjusting delivery settings.
- Delivering the purified oxygen.



### Nebulizer Machine

A nebulizer machine is a medication delivery device used to deliver medication in the form of a mist inhaled into the lungs. Inhaled medication is more rapidly delivered to the lungs, providing faster relief from the feeling of shortness of breath.

### Medications

Oral medications may include lorazepam (Ativan®) to relieve anxiety, ipratropium bromide/albuterol solution (DuoNeb®) to relieve shortness of breath and morphine sulfate oral solution, used to treat pain and shortness of breath. Tidewell provides instruction on the dosage of each medication and how to properly administer the dose.



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# Hand Hygiene

Washing your hands is one of the most basic defenses against the spread of germs and bacteria. Hands commonly come in contact with the face, where germs easily enter the body through the mouth, nose and eyes.

During flu season, it is especially important to follow basic hand hygiene rules to prevent the spread of flu viruses.

Someone who is under hospice care may be especially susceptible to germs. Help prevent the spread of germ by following general hand hygiene guidelines:

- Always wash hands after using the bathroom.
- Always wash hands before eating.
- Wash hands or use antibacterial gel after coming in contact with health care workers.
- Make sure all visitors clean hands thoroughly.
- Use antibacterial gel is soap and water is not available.

*When in doubt, ask your health care worker if they have cleaned their hands.*

## PROPER HANDWASHING STEPS:

- If using a cloth towel to dry hands, have it nearby before you start to wash.
- Wet hands with water.
- Apply soap to hands. Liquid soap is best—germs can live on bar soap. If you do use bar soap, store it on a rack that allows it to dry between uses.
- Rub hands together vigorously for at least 15 seconds, making sure to cover all surfaces of hands, fingers, and thumbs.
- Rinse hands well to remove soap residue.
- Dry hands gently and thoroughly using soft paper towels. If using cloth towels, remember that damp towels may harbor germs. Allow them to dry out after use, and replace them often.
- Use towel to turn off faucet.

## ABOUT DISINFECTING HAND SANITIZERS:

Alcohol-based cleansers kill germs to help prevent infection so choose a gel or foam sanitizer containing alcohol. Use hand sanitizers:

- For routine cleansing of hands anytime they are not visibly dirty.
- After contact with contaminated objects in the environment.
- Before and after you care for someone who is very sick, very old or very young.
- After touching someone's skin, especially when the other person has a cold or other illness.
- When you travel.
- When soap and water are not readily available.
- Whenever you want to clean your hands.



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# Common Morphine Myths

Many myths surround the use of morphine. This opiate is used for pain relief and helps patients manage difficulty breathing.

Morphine is a prescription medication.

## LET'S EXPLORE A FEW OF THE MYTHS ABOUT MORPHINE:

- 1. *Myth: Morphine causes drowsiness and mental clouding.***  
**Fact:** When morphine is first started drowsiness and mental clouding are frequent side effects. They usually subside within 72 hours.
- 2. *Myth: Morphine should only be given for severe pain.***  
**Fact:** Morphine is used effectively for the management of pain and difficulty breathing. As pain increases, the morphine dose can be adjusted upward to treat the increased pain. Morphine is considered the gold standard for three reasons:  
a) It is very effective and works quickly.  
b) It can be administered by many routes.  
c) It relieves pain and difficulty breathing.
- 3. *Myth: Morphine is addictive.***  
**Fact:** Addiction is impaired control over drug use and can result in inappropriate medication use. Hospice patients taking morphine to control common hospice symptoms such as pain or difficulty breathing is an example of appropriate medication use. This type of use is not considered addiction.
- 4. *Myth: Morphine stops breathing.***  
**Fact:** Morphine is the drug of choice for managing difficulty breathing. Administering morphine allows the patient with difficulty breathing to rest more comfortably.
- 5. *Myth: People who take morphine die sooner.***  
**Fact:** There is no evidence to support that morphine hastens death. Morphine is used to keep the patient comfortable. The timing of the patient death is because of the illness.

## MORPHINE ALLERGY:

You can be allergic to morphine just like any other medicine. Report signs of allergy immediately to your Tidewell nurse and discontinue the medication. Side effects can be mild or extremely bothersome, but do not always require stopping the medication.

### Signs of allergy include:

- Swelling of the face and tongue.
- Hives. Itchy, red raised bumps on the skin.

### Side effects include:

- Drowsiness or mental clouding.
- Constipation.
- Nausea.
- Vomiting.
- Itching.

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