

# FIRST AID IN RESPIRATORY MEDICINE

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# BREATHING DIFFICULTIES

## DEFINITION

Breathing difficulties can range from:

- Being short of breath
- Being unable to take a deep breath and gasping for air
- Feeling like you are not getting enough air

Breathing always a medical emergency (other than feeling difficulty is almost slightly winded from normal activity, such as exercise).

## CAUSES

There are many different causes for breathing problems. Common causes include:

- Asthma
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), sometimes called emphysema or chronic bronchitis
- Collapsed lung (Pneumothorax)
- Heart attack
- Heart disease or heart failure
- Injury to the neck, chest wall, or lung
- Lung cancer or cancer which has moved to the lung
- Pericardial effusion .
- Pleural effusion.
- Respiratory infections, including pneumonia, acute bronchitis, whooping cough, and others

## SYMPTOMS

Person with breathing difficulty may have:

- Bluish lips, fingers, and fingernails
- Chest moving in an unusual way as the person breathes (flail chest or paradoxical movement)
- Chest pain
- Confusion, lightheadedness, weakness, or sleepiness
- Cough
- Fever
- Muffled voice
- Need to sit up to breathe
- Swollen tongue

## FIRST AID

If someone is having breathing difficulty, immediately call 108 or your local emergency number, then:

- Check the person's airway,
- breathing, and
- pulse.

If necessary, begin CPR

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## CPR

### Administer CPR:

- Lay the person on his or her back
- Give chest compressions
- Tilt head slightly
- Breathe into the person's mouth
- Continue until EMS personnel arrive



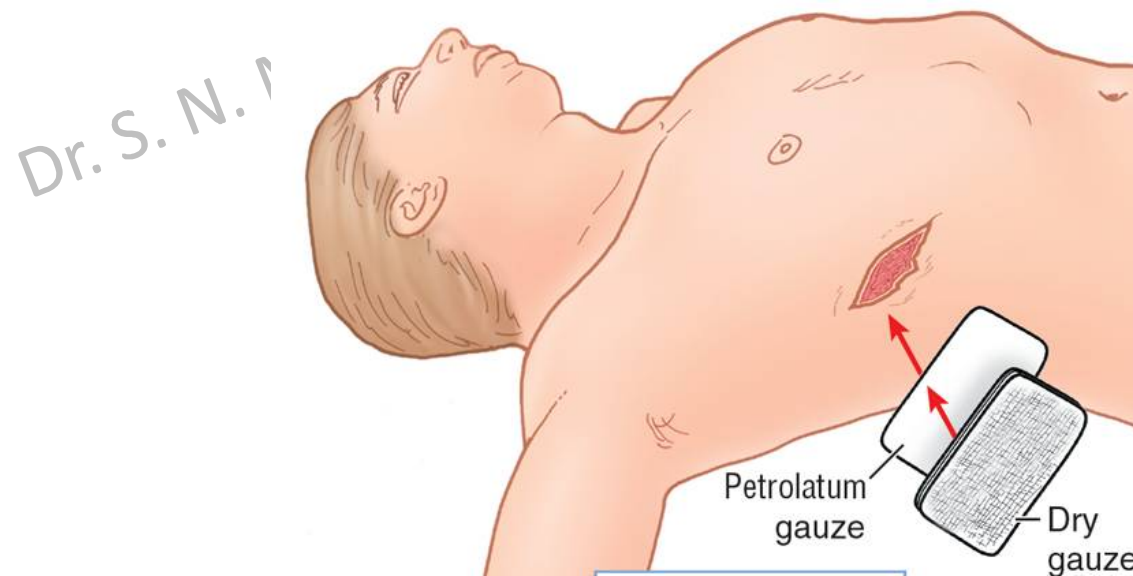
- Loosen any tight clothing.



- Help the person use any prescribed medication (an asthma inhaler or home oxygen).



- Continue to monitor the person's breathing and pulse until medical help arrives. DO NOT assume that the person's condition is improving if you can no longer hear abnormal breath sounds, such as wheezing.
- If there are open wounds in the neck or chest, they must be closed immediately, especially if air bubbles appear in the wound. Bandage such wounds at once

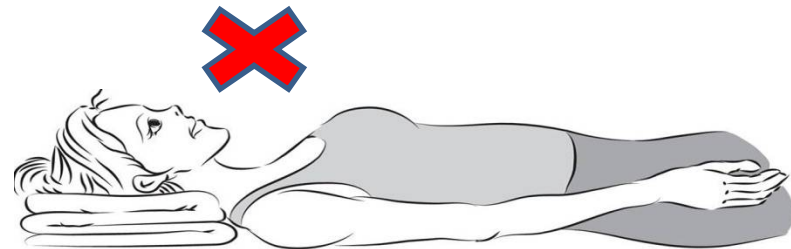




# DO NOT

## DO NOT

- Give the person food or drink.
- Move the person if there has been a chest or airway injury, unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Place a pillow under the person's head. This can close the airway.



Call 108 or your local emergency number if you or someone else has difficulty breathing, especially if you notice:

- Blue lips, fingers, or fingernails
- Chest pain
- Coughing up large amounts of blood
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Excessive drooling
- Facial, tongue, or throat swelling
- High-pitched or wheezing sounds
- Hives
- Inability to speak
- Nausea or vomiting
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Sweating

Consult the doctor right away if:

- Shortness of breath is brought on by coughing, especially productive coughing.
- Your child's cough has a barking sound.
- You have a fever, green or yellow phlegm, night sweats, weight loss, loss of appetite, or swelling in your legs.
- You are coughing up small amounts of blood.

# References

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