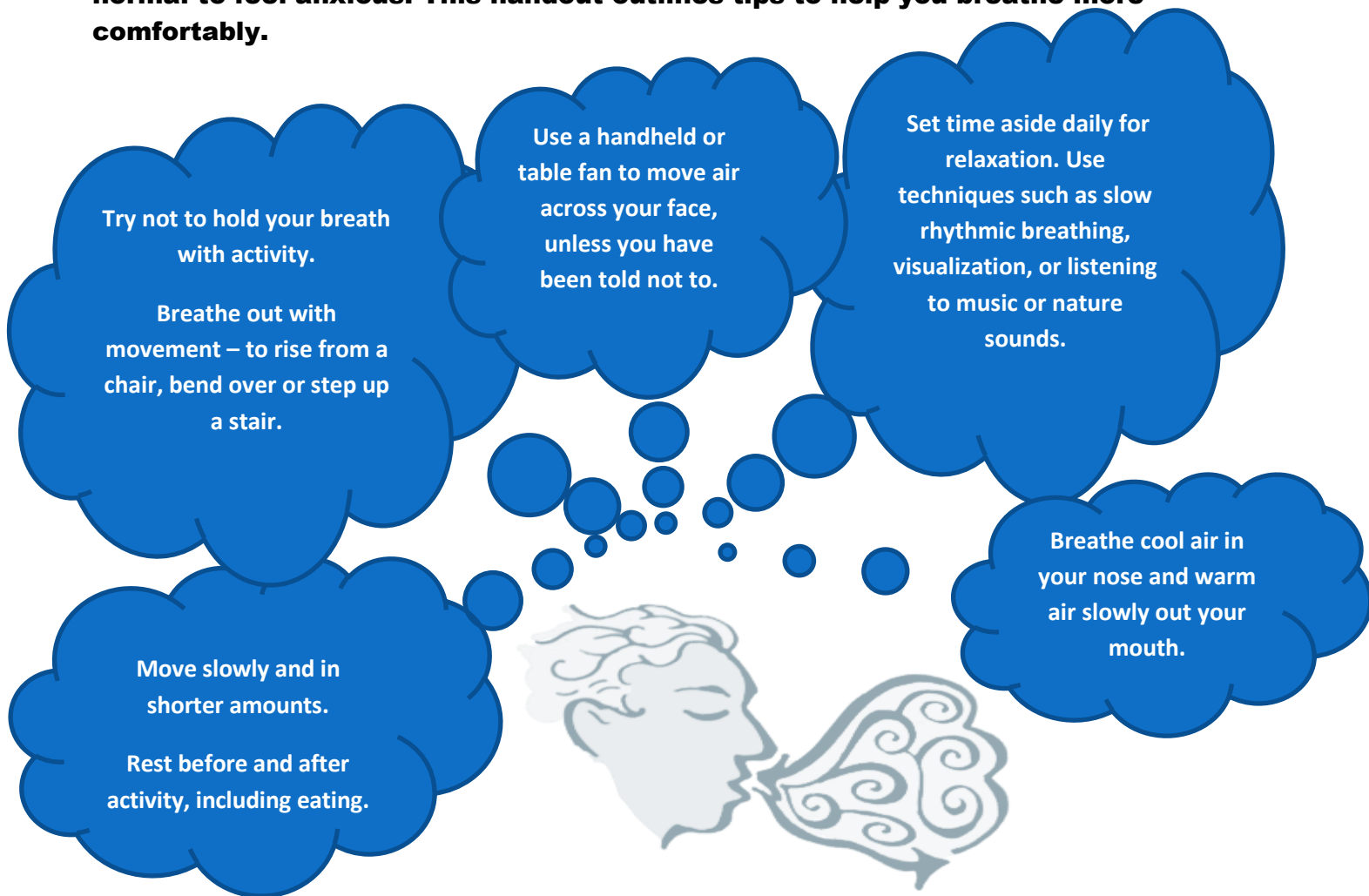


# Managing Shortness of Breath:

## Information for patients and families



**Your health care team will work with you to identify the causes of your shortness of breath and recommend treatment(s) specific for your palliative condition. Even with these treatments your shortness of breath may persist. It is normal to feel anxious. This handout outlines tips to help you breathe more comfortably.**



### **Are there medications that could help?**

Yes, medicine such as morphine or other opioids used appropriately can help decrease shortness of breath. As well as taking your regular prescribed doses, take your prescribed breakthrough dose before activities that trigger shortness of breath, like dressing or bathing to ease the sense of shortness of breath.

### **Do you need oxygen?**

Not always. Your health care team will assess the oxygen levels in your blood and if the levels are low, they may prescribe oxygen. Even though you feel short of breath, your lungs may still be taking in enough oxygen on their own. Moving air across your face with a fan (unless you have been told not to) or wiping a wet cloth across your nose and cheeks to cool your face can often help.

# Managing Shortness of Breath:

## Information for patients and families

### What can you do if your shortness of breath gets worse?

When you begin to feel short of breath:

1. Slow down or stop your activity.
2. Move into a supported position (see the images below to learn how to do this).
3. Try breathing in through your nose slowly and out gently through pursed lips (see recovery breathing below).
4. If needed, take a breakthrough dose of the medicine prescribed to help ease your shortness of breath.

Three supportive positions:

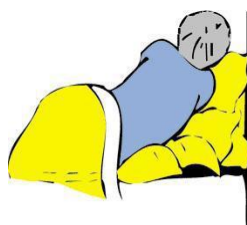
Images courtesy of BC Cancer Multimedia Services



Sit on a chair and lean forward with your hands on your knees



Relax forward onto a few pillows, keeping your feet on the ground.



Lie down on your side in a bed or reclining chair. Put 3-4 pillows under the side you are lying on so your body is supported.

### Tell family or friends how to help when you feel short of breath.

For example: turn on a fan (unless you have been told not to), stay quietly by your side, put their hand gently on your shoulder, or remind you to slow your breaths.

#### Recovery breathing:

- ✓ Leaning forward (see above), drop your chin and breathe in and out through pursed lips.
- ✓ In your mind say “slow breath in, longer breath out” or count to yourself “breathe in 1,2,3 breathe out 4,5,6,7.” Repeat until your breathing slows.
- ✓ Rest for a few minutes before continuing your activity and take medicine as prescribed.

**Write your personal action plan here:** (include when/how to contact your healthcare team)

Additional Reference: **Opioids for Symptom Control in Palliative Care Patient and Family Information**