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Definition

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Few sensations are as frightening as not being able to get enough air. Shortness of breath — known medically as dyspnea — is often described as an intense tightening in the chest, air hunger, difficulty breathing, breathlessness or a feeling of suffocation.

Very strenuous exercise, extreme temperatures, obesity and higher altitude all can cause shortness of breath in a healthy person. Outside of these examples, shortness of breath is likely a sign of a medical problem.

If you have unexplained shortness of breath, especially if it comes on suddenly and is severe, see your doctor as soon as possible.

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