

Hyperventilation

Hyperventilation is excessive breathing. It is normally caused by acute anxiety and it may accompany a panic attack. It can also occur in individuals who have recently experienced an emotional or psychological shock.

Signs of Hyperventilation

- Unnaturally fast, deep breathing
 - Attention-seeking behaviour
 - Dizziness
 - Feeling faint
 - Trembling or marked tingling in the hands and cramps in the hands and feet
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Treatment

Your aim with somebody who is hyperventilating is to remove them from the cause of distress, to reassure them, and to calm them down.

- Speak to them firmly, but be kind and reassuring.
 - Move them to a place that is quiet. If this is not possible, ask bystanders to leave or turn away.
 - If the casualty is unable to regain control of their breathing, ask them to re-breathe their own exhaled air from a paper bag.
 - Ask them to hold the paper bag over their mouth and nose and breathe in and out slowly into the bag about ten times. Then, to breathe without the bag for fifteen seconds.
 - The patient should continue to alternate this cycle of breathing with and without the bag, until the need to breathe rapidly has passed.
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Other causes of sudden shortness of breath

Sudden and unexpected breathlessness is most likely to be caused by one of the following health conditions.

A problem with your lungs or airways

Sudden breathlessness could be an [asthma attack](#).

Pneumonia (lung inflammation) may also cause shortness of breath and a cough. It's usually caused by an infection, so you'll need to take antibiotics.

A heart problem

It's possible to have a "silent" [heart attack](#) without experiencing all the obvious symptoms, such as chest pain and overwhelming anxiety.

In this case, shortness of breath may be the only warning sign you're having a heart attack. If you or your GP think this is the case, they'll give you aspirin and admit you to hospital straight away.

More unusual causes

These include:

- a severe allergic reaction
- pneumothorax – partial collapse of your lung caused by a small tear in the lung surface, which allows air to become trapped in the space around your lungs
- pulmonary embolism – a blockage in one of the blood vessels in the lung
- pleural effusion – a collection of fluid next to the lung
- diabetic ketoacidosis – a complication of diabetes where acids build up in your blood and urine

Other Useful Organisations

- [NHS 111](#) is the new telephone service which has replaced NHS Direct. You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is a fast and easy way to get the right help, whatever the time.
- [NHS.UK](#) is a website providing health and medical advice, an online symptom checker and a facility for searching for services near you.

Please note – The content on this website is provided for general information only, and should not be treated as a substitute for the medical advice of your own doctor or any other health care professional. If you are feeling unwell, make an appointment to see your GP or contact [NHS 111](#). In an emergency, dial **999**.

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Useful Organisations

St. John Ambulance Northumbria

Email: countyhq@northumbria.sja.org.uk

Website: www.sja.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 273 7938

Address: St. John House, NE4 9PQ

Emergency Department – Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI)

Website: <https://www.newcastle-hospitals.nhs.uk/services/emergency-department-ae/>

Telephone: 0191 233 6161

Address: Queen Victoria Road, NE1 4LP

NHS 111

Website: www.nhs.uk/111

Telephone: 0191 233 6161

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