

Shortness of breath

Shortness of breath might not be anything to worry about. But sometimes it can be serious and you'll need to get medical help.

Call 112 or 999 if:

- your chest feels tight or heavy
- you have pain that spreads to your arms, back, neck and jaw
- you feel sick or are getting sick

You could be having a heart attack or a problem with your lungs or airway.

Contact a GP if

you have shortness of breath and:

- it's lasted for longer than a month
- it gets worse when you have been active
- it gets worse when you lie down
- you have been coughing for 3 weeks or more
- you have coughed up blood
- swollen ankles

COVID-19 (coronavirus)

Shortness of breath with a [high temperature](#) can be a [symptom of COVID-19](#).

Contact your GP if you have these symptoms.

It's important to get medical advice to make sure it's nothing serious. You're not wasting anyone's time by getting it checked out.

Causes of shortness of breath

Shortness of breath can be caused by lots of different things, such as:

- a cold or chest infection
- asthma
- being overweight
- smoking

It can also be a sign of a [panic attack](#).

But it could be caused by something more serious, such as:

- a lung condition called [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease \(COPD\)](#)
- lung cancer

It can also be caused by heart failure, but this is rare.

Any treatment you may need will depend on what's causing your symptoms.

Do not try to diagnose the cause of your shortness of breath yourself - always contact a GP.

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