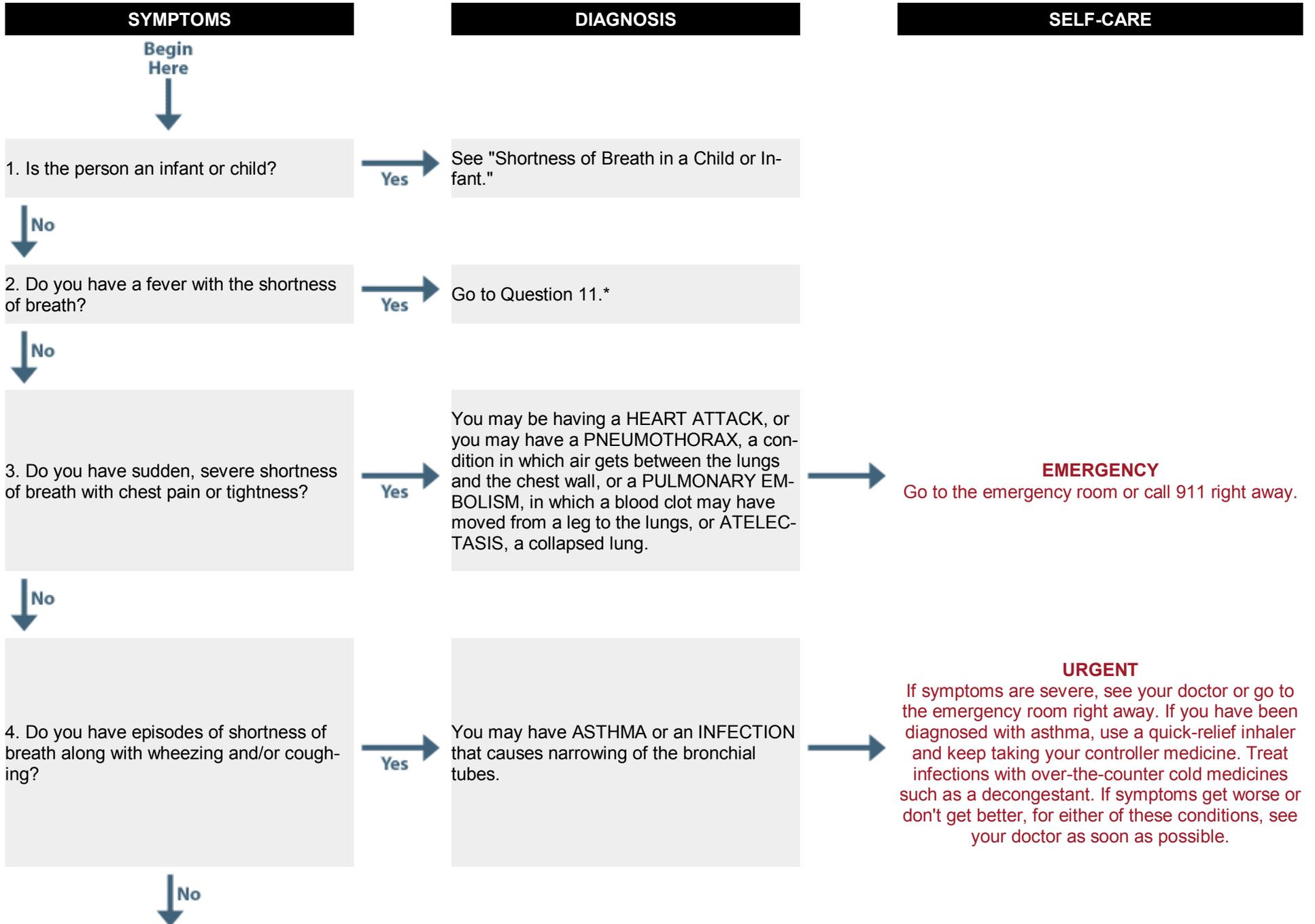


# Shortness of Breath

Shortness of breath (dyspnea) is a worrisome symptom and has many acute and chronic causes. Follow this chart for more information about the diseases and conditions in which shortness of breath occurs.



5. Have you been exposed to years of fumes, dust or cigarette smoke and has the shortness of breath been slowly getting worse?

↓ No

→ Yes

You may have CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD), a lung disease that includes CHRONIC BRONCHITIS and EMPHYSEMA.

→

See your doctor as soon as possible.

6. Have you worked in or around asbestos, wood dust, industrial fumes or in a coal mine?

↓ No

→ Yes

You may have OCCUPATIONAL LUNG DISEASE.

→

Stop smoking if you smoke (it will only make your problem worse). Talk to your employer, if possible, and see your doctor right away.

7. Are your feet and ankles swollen, and is it harder to breathe when you lie down flat?

↓ No

→ Yes

You may have CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE, which can cause fluid to build up in the lungs and feet.

→

See your doctor right away.

8. Are you tired all the time and do you have a dry cough, possibly with chest pain, and does your shortness of breath get worse when you exercise or do other physical activity?

↓ No

→ Yes

You may have INTERSTITIAL LUNG DISEASE or SARCOIDOSIS, both of which can cause scarring of the lungs, or PULMONARY HYPERTENSION, narrowing of the arteries that carry blood to the lungs.

→

See your doctor right away.

9. Are you tired all the time, and do you look pale?

↓ No

→ Yes

You may have ANEMIA, a condition in which the body doesn't get enough oxygen due to insufficient red blood cells.

→

Anemia can often be treated by including more iron in your diet, but see your doctor for diagnosis.

10. Are you breathing rapidly, feeling dizzy, or having numbness or tingling in your hands or around your mouth?

↓ No

→ Yes

These are symptoms of HYPERVENTILATION, an episode of over breathing usually caused by exercise or emotional distress.

→

Breathe through pursed lips (as if you are blowing out a candle) or cover your mouth and one nostril, breathing through the other nostril. If you don't get better after several minutes or you are in pain, go to the emergency room right away.

\*11. Do you have a fever and a painful cough with blood in the mucus?

↓ No

→ Yes

You may have an INFECTION or a more serious problem such as LUNG CANCER or PULMONARY EMBOLISM.

→

If you have blood in your mucus, see your doctor right away.

12. Do you have a fever with flu or cold symptoms and a cough that produces mucus?

Yes →

You may have BRONCHITIS, an infection of the bronchial tree in the lungs, or [PNEUMONIA](#), a serious lung infection.

→

If you have a high fever, are having a lot of trouble breathing, or if your lips or fingernails are bluish or gray, call your doctor right away. For less severe symptoms, use over-the-counter cough, cold and flu medicines. See your doctor if the symptoms get worse or if you don't get better.

↓ No

13. Do you have a fever, dry cough and chest pain and are you losing weight?

Yes →

You may have [HISTOPLASMOSIS](#), an INFECTION caused by a FUNGUS.

→

See your doctor.

↓ No

14. Do you have a high fever, chest pain, chills and a cough that produces a pus-like material?

Yes →

You may have a LUNG ABSCESS caused by an INFECTION.

→

**URGENT**  
See your doctor right away.

↓ No

For more information, please talk to your doctor. If you think the problem is serious, call your doctor right away.

*This tool has been reviewed by doctors and is for general educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for medical advice. The information in this tool should not be relied upon to make decisions about your health. Always consult your family doctor with questions about your individual condition(s) and/or circumstances. Source: American Academy of Family Physicians. Family Health & Medical Guide. Dallas: Word Publishing; 1996.*