

## Eli's Rehab Report

### Clip & Save: Spot Respiratory Distress -- And Reduce Readmissions -- With This List

**Keep distress signs front-and-center in your practice.**

Recognizing and treating your patients' early respiratory distress can greatly decrease your practice's readmissions rate. This is particularly true of situations when your therapist may be seeing a patient in a home setting, or even when a patient has come to receive rehabilitative or maintenance therapy, but suddenly develops respiratory distress.

**Strategy:** Train therapists to spot distress signs. Give them laminated cards to carry with them or post a list of the signs prominently in high-traffic areas where they are sure to see these signs. Keeping the signs top-of-mind will go a long way toward treating the symptoms before they become full-blown illnesses. Therapists can also refer to the list when assessing a patient's health.

You can create your own list of symptoms or use the following list, created by the **Ohio State University Medical Center**. Once you have respiratory distress under control, you can tackle other common reasons for readmission.

Signs of Respiratory Distress

#### ◆ Breathing rate

An increase in the number of breaths per minute may indicate that a person is having trouble breathing or not getting enough oxygen.

#### ◆ Color changes

A bluish color seen around the mouth, on the inside of the lips, or on the fingernails may occur when a person is not getting as much oxygen as needed. The color of the skin may also appear pale or gray.

#### ◆ Grunting

A grunting sound can be heard each time the person exhales. This grunting is the body's way of trying to keep air in the lungs so they will stay open.

#### ◆ Nose flaring

The openings of the nose spreading open while breathing may indicate that a person is having to work harder to breathe.

#### ◆ Chest retraction

The chest appears to sink in just below the neck and/or under the breastbone with each breath □ one way of trying to bring more air into the lungs.

#### ◆ Sweating

There may be increased sweat on the head, but the skin does not feel warm to the touch. More often, the skin may feel

cool or clammy. This may happen when the breathing rate is very fast.

◆ **Wheezing**

A tight, whistling or musical sound heard with each breath may indicate that the air passages may be smaller, making it more difficult to breathe.