

EMC 340 Introduction to Clinical Medicine

Stages of Respiratory Distress

David Trigg, MD


Outcomes

At the end of this lecture, the learner will be able to:

- Recognize the signs and symptoms of the various grades of severity of respiratory distress.
- Discuss the type and importance of initial interventions for various grades of respiratory distress.


Stages of Respiratory Distress

- 1/6 - ↑ Rate
- 2/6 - Airway
- 3/6 - Intercostals
- 4/6 - Accessory Muscles
- 5/6 - Organ failure
- 6/6 - Respiratory Arrest



Stage 1


Increased Respiratory Rate
Tachypnea



Stage 2

The patient positioning themselves to best facilitate an open airway.

- Sniffing position
- Tripod position
- Grunting
- Nasal flaring
- Pursed lips



Stage 3

Intercostal muscle use creating chest retractions.



Stage 4

The use of accessory muscles.

- Neck muscles
- Abdominal muscles
- Rocking



Stage 5


End organ failure

Cyanosis
Confusion
Floppiness



Stage 6


Respiratory Arrest



Mild Respiratory Distress

Increased Work of Breathing


1/6 - Tachypnea
and
2/6 - Airway positioning



Moderate Respiratory Distress

Further increased work of breathing


3/6 - Intercostal retractions
and
4/6 - Accessory muscle use



Severe Respiratory Distress

Decreased work of breathing


5/6 - Organ failure
and
6/6 - Respiratory distress



Treatment

End organ failure requires:

- Aggressive intervention.
- Evaluating the issue of hypoxic drive.
- Prevention of the consequences of respiratory failure.
 - ↓ oxygenation causing end organ failure
 - ↓ ventilation causing acidosis → shock
- Prevention of respiratory arrest



Summary

We have discussed:

- The various signs of respiratory distress are weighted and **not equal** in significance.
- The importance of initial intervention for various grades of increasing severity.
- How hypoxic drive is not a contraindication for aggressive intervention in respiratory failure.
