

SHORTNESS OF BREATH

You need an organized, anatomical approach

Approach to Shortness of Breath

Wells Score

Clinical Signs and Symptoms
of a DVT (+3)

PE is #1 Diagnosis or Equally
Likely (+3)

Heart Rate >100 (+1.5)

Immobilization (x3 days) or
Surgery within last four weeks
(+1.5)

Previous PE or DVT (+1.5)

Hemoptysis (+1)

Malignancy w/ Treatment in
Last 6 months (+1)

(Low < 2) (High > 6)

PERC Rule

Age >50

HR >100

O₂% < 95%

Prior history of PE or VTE

Trauma/Surgery last 4 weeks

Hemoptysis

Exogenous Estrogen

Unilateral Leg Swelling

1) Differential Diagnosis (NOT EXHAUSTIVE!!!)

Upper Airway: Angioedema, Foreign Body, Abscess, Obstruction

Lower Airway: COPD, Asthma

Alveoli: Pneumonia, Pulmonary Edema

Blood: Anemia, Acidosis (Sepsis, DKA, etc), Toxins (Aspirin)

Blood Vessels: Pulmonary Embolism, Aortic Dissection

Heart: Ischemia, Heart Failure, Cardiac Tamponade

*** Others include pneumothorax, pleural effusion, neurologic disorders, psychogenic

2) Physical Exam

Upper Airway: Stridor, Gurgling, Voice Changes, Obstructions

Lower Airway: Wheezing

Alveoli: Crackles

Blood: Pallor

Vessels: (See Wells Score/PERC Rule)

Heart: Dysrhythmia, Jugular Venous Distension, Edema

3) Testing

Common: Chest Xray, EKG, CBC, Electrolytes

Uncommon: Neck Imaging, Blood Gases, Salicylate Level, Lactic Acid, Troponin, BNP

4) Calculate Wells Score and PERC (See Side Panel)