

Staying Active With COPD

Simple tasks like getting up from a chair can leave people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease breathless. So they may think exercise is out of the question.

On the contrary, it's important for even those with advanced lung disease to stay active. When you exercise, your muscles get stronger. Strong muscles need less oxygen. Therefore, exercising actually makes it easier for you to breathe.

Get started

It's important to start slowly. Some people may begin with a few minutes a day, while others are able to do more. Remember to speak with your doctor before beginning an exercise program. He or she can help you decide what level is right for you.

Setting goals helps you stick with your program. Be sure your first goal is one you know you can meet, and then gradually work up to higher goals. Eventually, you'll want to be

able to exercise for 20 to 30 minutes, two to four times a week. But if you try to do that much in the beginning, you might give up.

A pulmonary rehabilitation program can help you get the most out of exercise. In addition to physical training, rehab programs offer nutrition counseling and education. Plus, programs offer support and supervision for those who aren't confident exercising on their own.

Get going

Always begin exercise with a warm-up period. While simple stretching warms up your muscles, pursed-lip breathing warms up your lungs.

First, inhale through your nose so your stomach muscles expand, and then exhale

through your mouth with your lips pursed. It's important to exhale twice as long as you inhale so you get all the air out of your lungs. Practice the technique for 10 minutes. Once you get the hang of it, you can do pursed-lip breathing during exercise as well.

After warming up, perform your main low-impact aerobic activity such as swimming and walking. If you need oxygen therapy during exercise, a treadmill or stationary bike is your best bet. Pick activities you enjoy, and alternate them so you're more likely to stay motivated.

Resistance training (lifting a light weight with your arms or legs) is important for making muscles stronger and increasing endurance. This can help you reduce fatigue and reverse deconditioning.

Finally, be sure to end your workout with a cool-down activity, which can be stretching, or walking or swimming at a slower pace.



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Rewards

Even the smallest amount of exercise is better than no exercise at all. An active lifestyle increases your physical capacity even though impaired lung function continues to persist after exercise training.

An exercise regimen will give you more confidence and independence, and daily activities like shopping and cooking soon will be easier.

Editor's Note: Information adapted from the American Association for Respiratory Care, the American College of Sports Medicine, and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

Lauren Constance Everingham is a former ADVANCE staff writer. ■

notes

Your doctor or therapist has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about an issue related to your health. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your doctor or therapist.

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5111 Venture Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48108
(800) 322-2209 www.nustep.com

