

Now That You Know It's COPD, Here's How to Breathe Better

You have taken the important step of knowing your symptoms and seeing your doctor for testing and a diagnosis. While Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a serious lung disease that worsens over time, your provider can suggest treatment options and ways to help you manage COPD. Here are some things you can do now to breathe better and improve your quality of life.

1. QUIT SMOKING

You know you need to quit smoking. Smoking will cause COPD flare-ups and significantly exacerbate symptoms. It's never too late to quit and quitting will slow down the progression of the disease and improve your quality of life. Get help to quit today. Visit smokefree.gov, lungusa.org, or call **1-800-QUIT NOW** for more information.

2. AVOID EXPOSURE TO POLLUTANTS

Try to stay away from anything that could irritate your lungs, like dust and strong fumes. Stay indoors when the outside air quality is poor and avoid places where there might be cigarette smoke.

3. VISIT YOUR DOCTOR REGULARLY

See your doctor on a regular basis. Bring a list of your medications to each office visit. If your symptoms worsen, or if you have new ones, be sure to tell your doctor.

4. FOLLOW TREATMENT ADVICE

Take your medications exactly as prescribed. And follow your provider's advice on how to manage your COPD.

5. TAKE PRECAUTIONS AGAINST THE FLU

The flu can cause serious problems for people with COPD. Do your best to avoid crowds during flu season. Get a flu shot every year, and ask your provider about the pneumonia vaccine.

6. SEEK SUPPORT FROM OTHERS WHO HAVE COPD

See if your local hospital has a COPD support group. You can also find a very active COPD community online. Family members can be supportive, too, as you learn to live with and manage your COPD. ■



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Diagnosis and Treatment of COPD

IT STARTS WITH A TEST CALLED SPIROMETRY

Spirometry is one of the best and most common ways to help diagnose COPD. Using a machine called a spirometer, this noninvasive breathing test measures the amount of air a person can blow out of the lungs (volume) and how fast (flow). The results help your doctor assess how well your lungs are working and the best course of treatment.

If necessary, your doctor may suggest one of more of these treatment options:

MEDICATIONS

Two of the most common are bronchodilators and inhaled steroids, but your provider may recommend other types of medications for your COPD.

Bronchodilators usually come in an inhaler and work to relax and open up the muscles around your airways, making it easier to breathe. Inhaled steroids help prevent the airways from getting inflamed.

PULMONARY REHABILITATION

This is a program that helps you learn to exercise and manage your disease with physical activity and counseling. It can help you stay active and carry out your day-to-day tasks.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TRAINING

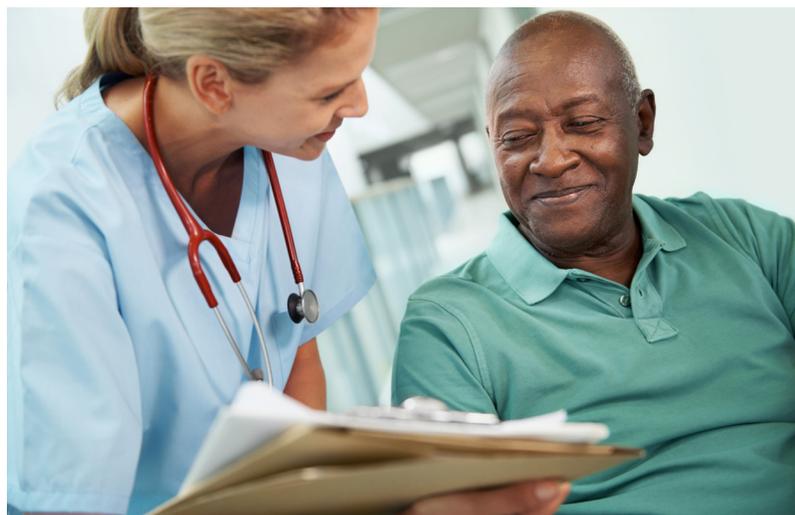
Your doctor or a pulmonary therapist can teach you some activities to help your arms and legs get stronger and/or breathing exercises that strengthen the muscles needed for breathing.

OXYGEN TREATMENT

If your COPD is severe, your doctor might suggest that you breathe oxygen some or all of the time to help with shortness of breath.

SURGERY

In some severe cases of COPD, providers may suggest lung surgery to improve breathing and alleviate some symptoms.



WHAT TO DO IF YOUR SYMPTOMS SUDDENLY WORSEN

Symptoms of COPD can get worse all of a sudden. When this happens, it is much harder to catch your breath. You might also have:

- > Chest tightness
- > More coughing
- > A change in your cough (becomes more productive; more mucus is expelled)
- > A fever

There could be many causes for symptoms getting worse, such as a lung infection or heart disease related to severe lung damage. The best thing to do is call your doctor right away. ■

Source: COPD Learn More Breathe Better® Campaign, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

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Can I Exercise with COPD?

If you have COPD, you might think exercise is a great idea—for everyone else. After all, you sometimes feel short of breath just resting on the sofa.

But the less active you are, the harder it is to breathe. And the harder it is to breathe, the less you want to work out. Exercise can break this cycle by helping you breathe easier all the time.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

Exercise can improve your quality of life by:

- > Building stronger muscles for breathing
- > Helping you use oxygen more efficiently, which means less shortness of breath
- > Providing more stamina for daily chores—and favorite recreational activities
- > Reducing your risk for serious conditions like diabetes and heart disease

EXERCISE SAFELY

People with COPD should get at least 15 minutes of moderate exercise three days a week. But before starting, ask your doctor what type and level of exercise is safe. Find out if you need medical support (oxygen, for example). Also, ask about ways that can help control breathlessness, such as pursed-lip breathing.

STEP-BY-STEP

Walking counts as moderate exercise and is safe for most people. To get your exercise routine going, take these first steps:

- > Walk in place a few minutes each day
- > Take a slow five-to-ten minute stroll three to five times a week; each week, increase your time by one or two minutes
- > Park the car and walk to visit a friend, mail a letter, or get a library book

Look for other enjoyable ways to be active, such as swimming or gardening. Soon you may be surprising others with your new confidence, independence, and better health.

Exercise often makes people breathe harder. But if you have COPD, it can help you breathe easier, too. ■

Sources: American College of Sports Medicine; American Council on Exercise; American Thoracic Society



Six Tips for Tackling Everyday Tasks

Dishes to wash. Laundry to sort. Meals to make. Just the thought of chores can leave anyone breathless—especially when you have COPD.

But many activities may be easier when you try new ways of doing them. Here are six suggestions:

- 1. Slow down.** Do you go like gangbusters and tire out quickly? Pacing yourself may help you save energy for other tasks—and avoid shortness of breath.
- 2. Sit down on the job.** Pull up a chair when folding clothes, dressing, cooking, or shaving.
- 3. Organize your space.** From TV remotes to kitchen towels, put often-used items in convenient, easy-to-reach places. Then you won't have to bend over, climb stairs, or constantly get up to grab things.
- 4. Go mobile.** Use a cart to move dishes, laundry, or other items around your home.
- 5. Simplify your wardrobe.** Make dressing and undressing easier with loose-fitting clothes and shoes you can slip on and off.
- 6. Get equipped.** Take advantage of devices designed to help, such as a long-handled reacher for pulling on socks and shoes and for grabbing items in high places.

Sources: American College of Chest Physicians; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute



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GO GREEN

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