

Home Exercise Tips for People with COPD

Why is exercise important?

Exercise and activity is very important. Strong muscles improve function. Over time, exercise will reduce your level of breathlessness. This means you will be able to do your activities of daily living easier.

Remember . . . if you do not use it, you will lose it. Keep on moving.

Mental (psychological) benefits of regular exercise and activity:

- Increases your self-confidence and self-image
- Makes you feel good
- Improves concentration and memory
- Helps you relax and sleep better
- Helps control anxiety
- Helps reduce food cravings

Long-term physical benefits of regular exercise and activity:

- Helps your respiratory (breathing) muscles work better
- Helps you control your breathing better
- Improves your heart and lung function
- Improves the flexibility of your muscles
- Helps joints move to their full potential (also called “range of motion”)
- Maintains the health of your bones
- Enhances your coordination and balance
- Decreases your risk of injury and helps to manage pain
- Boosts your stamina (energy level)
- Optimizes weight control and increases lean muscle mass

- Helps with digestion
- And much more . . .

Recovery from regular exercise and activity:

Our muscles do a lot of work. At times, we may feel aches and pains during activity and exercise. This is normal. To help muscles recover, take rest breaks in between exercising.

How do I exercise at home?

It is important to maintain your exercise and activity levels. Your physical therapist will give you a home exercise program and a schedule to follow.

Tips to help you follow your home exercise program:

- Make exercise a regular part of your day.
- Set up an exercise space in your home with your equipment.
Other places to do your exercise routine:
 - Community Centre or Senior Centre
 - Fitness or Wellness Centre
 - YMCA or YWCA
 - Shopping mall walking
- Try to follow your schedule to keep on track.
- Give yourself time. It takes a few weeks to get into a routine.
- Avoid feeling discouraged. Remember, practice makes perfect.
- Balance rest with activity.

Your activity program may include:

- Daily breathing exercises
- Walking
- Going up and down stairs
- Riding a stationary bicycle

- Using a treadmill
- Doing arm and leg strengthening exercises

Keep an exercise record to help you see your progress and stay on track:

- Use the exercise sheets given to you by your therapist.
- Write down your reason for not exercising such as increased shortness of breath, feeling unwell or high humidity.

Walking guidelines

- Start with a short walk. See how far you can go before you become breathless. Stop and rest whenever you are short of breath.
- Count the number of steps you take while you inhale (breathe in). Then exhale (breathe out) for twice as many steps. For example, if you inhale while taking 2 steps, exhale through pursed lips while taking the next 4 steps. Learn to walk so breathing in and exhaling out will become a habit once you find a comfortable breathing rate.
- Try to increase your walking distance. If you set specific goals, you'll go farther every day. Many people have found that an increase of 10 feet a day is a good goal.
- Set reasonable goals. Don't walk so far that you can't get back to your starting point without difficulty breathing. Remember, if you are short of breath after limited walking, stop and rest.
- Never overdo it. Always stop and rest for 2 or 3 minutes when you start to become short of breath.

Stair climbing

- Hold the handrail lightly to keep your balance and help you climb.
- Take your time.
- Step up while exhaling (breathing out) with pursed lips. Place your whole foot flat on each step. Go up two steps with each exhalation.

- Inhale (breathe in) while taking a rest before the next step.
- Going downstairs is much easier. Hold the handrail and place each foot flat on the step. Count the number of steps you take while inhaling, and take twice as many steps while exhaling.

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