

About.com COPD

Exercise and COPD

Exercise and COPD Go Hand-in-Hand

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After reading this article, you will have an opportunity to share about what type of exercise program is easiest for you to maintain, in spite of having COPD.

Exercise and [COPD](#)¹ should go hand-in-hand. Why? Because an exercise program can help you regain a sense of control over your life, increase your self-esteem and improve your overall quality of life. Exercise has proven to be beneficial to thousands of people with COPD, and it can help you too. Here's how:

Taking the First Step

In order to obtain lasting results from exercise, you must develop a life-long commitment to it. This means exercising even when you don't feel like it. The following will help you assess your own personal exercise needs:

- **Getting started**-- Before beginning any type of exercise program, it is important to speak with your health care provider to make sure the program you choose is safe. If there are reasons that may prevent you from doing certain types of exercises, your doctor can discuss possible alternatives that may better suit you.
- **Identify how far you can go**-- When you first start to exercise, you may quickly become fatigued. Don't be discouraged. It is important that you initially learn to what level of exercise you are safely comfortable with. As your endurance level builds, you will be able to exercise longer with less effort.
- **Setting goals**-- You will reap the greatest rewards from exercising if you work toward a reachable goal. Determine what your goals are by writing them down. Keep your goals in mind when you hit a rough spot that may cause you to feel discouraged. Whether your goals are to breathe better or to rely less on others, identifying your goals will help you better accomplish them.
- **Pulmonary rehabilitation**²-- Many patients benefit greatly from attending a pulmonary rehabilitation program (PRP), especially those who are [newly diagnosed with COPD](#)³. A PRP will teach you about your lungs in great detail, as well as how to exercise and do other activities with less shortness of breath.

To find a PRP nearest you, visit the [American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation](#)⁴ website or call the Lung Helpline at (800)-LUNGUSA (586-4872).

- **A word about oxygen**-- You may need oxygen during exercise, even if you don't use it otherwise. If you are already on oxygen, it may need to be increased during exercise. Be sure to discuss oxygen therapy during exercise with your health care provider.

Your health care provider may want to know your oxygen levels during exercise, before prescribing or increasing your oxygen flow rate. To determine your oxygen levels during exercise, you may want to purchase a [pulse oximeter](#)⁵. Many insurance plans will reimburse the cost of a pulse oximeter with a doctor's order.

[Pulse Oximeter Monitors: Compare Prices](#)⁶

Learn more about [oxygen therapy](#)⁷.

Types of Exercises

The basics of a safe and effective exercise program include choosing an exercise you will enjoy. There are three types of exercises that you can incorporate in to your exercise routine:

- **Flexibility exercises**⁸ are designed to help you improve your range of motion, posture and breathing. You should do them before and after exercising. Flexibility exercises include stretches of your neck, shoulders and calves.
- **Endurance exercises**⁹ help improve the function of your lungs, as well as your heart and blood vessels. In the long run, these are the best types of exercises to help you withstand activities of daily living. Endurance exercises include walking, biking or swimming.
- **Strength-training exercises**¹⁰ help build and strengthen your muscles. Strong muscles will allow you to perform daily activities, such as housework or mowing the lawn, with less effort. Examples of strength training include lifting weights or working with [stretchy bands](#).¹¹

Breathing During Exercise

Doing [pursed-lip breathing](#)¹² during exercise will help you maintain adequate oxygen levels and reduce shortness of breath. In addition, always try to exhale, or breathe out, during the most difficult part of the exercise, and inhale, or breathe in, during the easiest part of the exercise. For example,

exhale when you raise your arms above your head, and inhale as you lower them.

For more tips on breathing see below:

[Breathing Techniques: Getting the Most Out of Your Breath](#)¹³

[Performing Diaphragmatic Breathing with Pursed Lips](#)¹⁴

Using the Dyspnea Scale

The [dyspnea](#)¹⁵ scale measures shortness of breath and ranges from 0 to 10, which is very, very severe. You can use the dyspnea scale during exercise to determine how hard you are working to breathe, and then pace yourself accordingly. For example, if your shortness of breath is slight, you are at a level 1. If your shortness of breath is moderate, you are at a level 3. You are at a level 5 if you feel that your shortness of breath is severe, and if you cannot catch your breath at all, you are at a level 10. Keeping your level of dyspnea between levels 3 and 5 is best during exercise, unless your doctor or pulmonary rehabilitation team tells you otherwise.

Read more about dyspnea:

["Breaking the Dyspnea Cycle"](#)¹⁶

["Most Common Symptoms of COPD"](#)¹⁷

Recognizing Signs of Overexertion

Stop exercising if you notice any of the following signs of overexertion:

- Unusual or an increasing level of shortness of breath
- Chest discomfort or chest pain
- Burning, pressure, tightness or heaviness in your chest
- Unusual pain in your jaw, neck, shoulders, arms or back
- A racing feeling in your heart
- Heart palpitations (feeling that your heart is skipping a beat)
- Lightheadedness or dizziness
- Nausea
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Unusual pain in the joints

Exercise and COPD are two words that many COPD patients often fear. Shortness of breath, weakness and lack of energy often tie into this fear. Learning the basics of exercising when you have COPD will get you well on your way to living a healthier lifestyle.

Need some ideas on the right exercise program for you? Read the [Top 10 Exercise Videos for People With COPD](#).¹⁸

Sources:

American Lung Association. <http://www.lungusa.org>¹⁹

American Thoracic Society. *Patient Information: Pulmonary Rehabilitation*.²⁰

Living Well with Chronic Lung Disease. The StayWell Company. 2005.

This About.com page has been optimized for print. To view this page in its original form, please visit: <http://copd.about.com/od/livingwithcopd/a/exercisebasics.htm>

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