



COPD: Using Exercise to Feel Better

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Overview

When you have COPD, activity and exercise can:

- Build muscle strength and endurance. This will help you be more active—you will be able to do more activities for longer amounts of time.
- Reduce shortness of breath.

Upper body exercises increase strength in arm and shoulder muscles, which provide support to the rib cage and can help improve breathing. They also help in daily tasks such as carrying groceries and doing housework.

Lower body exercises develop lower body muscles and will help you move around more easily for longer periods of time.

Aerobic exercise gets more oxygen to your muscles. This allows them to work longer.

Exercises for COPD can be done nearly anywhere. They are often done as part of a pulmonary rehabilitation program.

How do you exercise for COPD?

Exercises for COPD are simple to do and take little time.

If you become breathless while doing any of the exercises, rest in a position where your shoulders are supported, such as in a chair, and wait until you can breathe easily again.

- Talk to your doctor.
Your doctor may ask that you do specific exercises and will help you figure out how often and how long to do them. You may also get help with setting your long-term exercise program goals. It will take time before you are able to reach your goals. But how long it takes is not as important as doing the exercises consistently.
- Start slowly and gradually.
For each exercise, either time how long you can do it or count the number of times you can do it before you are mildly out of breath. Then rest and move on to the next exercise. Each week, increase the time you spend doing each exercise or how many times you do each one.
- Pick activities that you enjoy.
- Always have a warm-up and cool-down.

This is a good time for doing stretches.

- Pay attention to your breathing.
Try to breathe slowly to save your breath. Breathe in through your nose, keeping your mouth closed. This warms and moisturizes the air you breathe. Breathe out through pursed lips.

Aerobic exercise

Aerobic exercises increase the amount of oxygen that is delivered to your muscles. More oxygen helps the muscles work longer. This helps you do more activities for longer periods of time.

Any exercise that raises your heart rate and keeps it up for a long time will improve your aerobic fitness. These exercises include:

- Walking.
- Using a treadmill.
- Cycling or using a stationary bicycle.
- Swimming.
- Water aerobics.

Daily activities can also be aerobic. These activities include:

- Walking to work or to run errands.
- Sweeping (perhaps to fast-paced music).
- Playing actively with children.
- Walking your dog.

Talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program. Your doctor will help you know how often and how long to exercise. You can also get help setting your long-term exercise goals.

Checking your exercise intensity

The talk test is an easy way to check your exercise intensity.

- You're getting moderate aerobic activity if you can talk but can't sing while you do the activity.
- You're getting vigorous aerobic activity if you can only say a few words while you do it.
- You are exercising too hard if you can't talk while you do it.
- You may not be exercising hard enough if you can sing while you do it.

Related Information

- Being Active When You Have Health Problems
- COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease)

Credits

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