Being Active When You Have COPD

Being active will help you feel better, move better and sleep better. Experts now say that any physical activity counts toward better health — even just a few minutes!

When you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) you get short of breath easily. Doing the simplest things can become tiring and difficult. Regular exercise will improve your stamina and strength and help you to do daily and recreational activities with less stress. You will also strengthen your bones and muscles, increase your self-confidence and breathe easier with less effort. It’s important to stay physically active to keep feeling these benefits.

Getting Started

Talk with Your Doctor
Talk to your health care provider about joining a pulmonary rehabilitation program. Clinical exercise physiologists and respiratory/physical therapists can design the best activity plan for you and help you stay active on your own.

Keep It Simple
Sit less and move around more! Walk to the mailbox. Take the dog outside. Dance in the kitchen. Use the stairs. Start at an easy pace. Stop and rest when you need to. Find small opportunities to move throughout your day.

Be Active with a Friend
Do activities you enjoy and find an exercise buddy at home, in the neighborhood or at work. Those who exercise with a friend tend to stick with it longer than those who go it alone.

Motivation
Think of 2 or 3 personally meaningful goals you’d like to achieve through becoming active. For example, you may want to be able to walk without feeling short of breath or get back to an activity that you haven’t done since being diagnosed with COPD.

Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.
Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activity increases your heart rate and breathing to gradually improve your stamina. Build up to doing at least 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity activity (like a brisk walk, light cycling, dancing or water exercise) to vigorous activity (like jogging, singles tennis or hiking hills).

What?
Any rhythmic, continuous activity

How often?
At least 3-5 days/week

How hard?
Fairly light to somewhat hard

How much?
Start w/a few minutes. Gradually build up to 20-60 total minutes over the day.

Interval training can be helpful for those with COPD. For example, after warming up at an easy pace, walk 1 minute faster and then 2 minutes at a slow speed or sit down. Pedal a stationary bike faster for 1 minute followed by 2 minutes at an easy recovery pace. Repeat 4 times. Walk to your mailbox and back one time. Increase your repetitions and walking pace on a daily or weekly basis as you become more fit.

Aerobic Activity Tips and Cautions

To stay safe and injury free:
- Start with light to medium effort. Don’t hold your breath during exercise.
- Gradually increase your pace and time spent being active — give your body time to adapt.
- Warm up and cool down at any easy pace before and after exercise.
Strength Training

People with COPD often get weak because they limit their activity. Strength training makes you stronger, can help prevent falls and ease COPD symptoms. Strength training makes fun activities or daily chores like lifting laundry baskets or yardwork easier and safer.

**What?**
Hand weights, resistance bands/tubes, light dumbbells, weight machines or your own body (such as wall push-ups and chair sit-to-stands)

**How often?**
2-3 days/week

**How hard?**
Start with light effort. Build up to medium or hard effort.

**How much?**
8-12 repetitions (for each major muscle group). Repeat 2-4 times.

Remember: Get help from a certified exercise professional. They can teach you the right way to do exercises and how to breathe properly.

Strength Training Tips and Cautions

° Slowly increase how much you lift and how often.
° Avoid straining or holding your breath; this causes your blood pressure to go up.
° You may have mild muscle soreness 12-24 hours after your exercise session—this is normal! If pain lasts more than one week, contact your health care provider.

Other Types of Physical Activity

Aerobic activity and strength training are at the heart of a program for those with COPD. But you may enjoy and benefit from these other options.

**Take more steps**
Use a smart phone or activity tracker. Slowly build to 2,000 more daily steps than you’re doing now. Good job! Then aim for 7,000-9,000 steps/day.

**Just for Fun**
Find ways of being active that are just plain fun. Tend your garden. Dance. Try ping pong. Play with your kids or grandkids. Find what makes you smile and do it often.

**Flexibility**
Stretch your muscles 2-3 days/week to the point of feeling tightness. Hold for 10-30 seconds (30-60 seconds for older adults). For example, stretch your calves or the back of your thighs.

**Balance and posture**
Do balance and posture exercises using a chair, table or bench for balance. Try slow squats, pick up things off the floor, do yoga or tai chi.

Get More Help
Get more information and support from the COPD Foundation at copdfoundation.org. Go to acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro to find an ACSM certified exercise professional near you.

How will I get started this week?