

# Being Active When You Have COPD

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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.**

## COPD Tips and Facts

Pulmonary rehabilitation includes help from many different specialists. You'll do supervised exercise, learn how to breathe easier and receive guidance on how to manage your medications and breathing challenges.

Discuss your activity options and concerns with your health care provider. Are there safety considerations before starting or increasing physical activity? If you use supplemental oxygen or an inhaler, how does that fit into your plan? Is there a better time of day?

Avoid walking outside when it's very cold, very hot or on high pollution days. Choose indoor options instead such as pedaling a stationary bike, walking around the dining room table or walking up stairs slowly.

A rollator has been shown to help people with COPD walk farther. If you need it, you'll have a seat handy in case you need a break.

## 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?

3-5 days/week



### How hard?

Fairly light to somewhat hard/hard



### How much?

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



**Remember:** Fit in 5 or 10 minutes here and there. Or go for 20-30 minutes. Take breaks when you need to. At first, several short intervals may work better than trying to go for a long time. Be active however and wherever you can. Every minute adds up!

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.

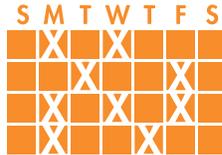
## What?

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  
\*Rest day in between



## 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](https://copdfoundation.org).

Go to [acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro](https://acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro) to find **an ACSM certified exercise professional** near you.

How will I get started **this week?** \_\_\_\_\_