



PULMONARY REHAB

Lessening the Effects of COPD

You may already know there is no cure for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). However, it's important that you know there is hope. Much can be done to lessen the side effects and symptoms of the disease. You can lead an active and rewarding life by following the advice of your physician and by following some simple tips.

Stay active

Inactivity can lead to muscle wasting, weakening of the heart, and mental depression. Daily activity helps your body function more efficiently and keeps you mentally alert.

It's easier to stay active if you simplify work and other activities in order to save energy. Eliminate unnecessary tasks. Break activities down into steps and alternate them with frequent periods of rest. It's best to plan ahead and avoid rushing.

Start a regular exercise program recommended by your doctor. Always start a new program slowly, and gradually increase your activity. Two easy, convenient, and inexpensive forms of exercise are walking and gardening.

Watch your diet

Food provides your body with energy. You use more energy to breathe because you have COPD. It's important to eat a healthy variety of foods to help your body function at its best.

Try to maintain a normal weight. If you're underweight, you will have less energy stores to pull from. If overweight, your heart has to work harder and you will experience more shortness of breath.

If your doctor orders a special diet, stick to it. Avoid "gassy" foods that bloat your stomach and make it harder to breathe. It's especially important to limit your salt intake if you tend to retain fluids. If eating tires you, eat smaller meals more frequently. If you are on oxygen, use it with meals.

Drink plenty of fluids

Drink three to four quarts of liquid per day unless your doctor advises otherwise. This will keep your mucus thin and easier to cough up.

Relax

Fatigue and tension can contribute to shortness of breath, so take time each day to relax, both physically and mentally. Take naps if you feel the need. Rest mentally by listening to soothing music or by doing something you find relaxing. If you have difficulty relaxing, consult your doctor.

Avoid problems

Your ability to recognize and avoid those things causing you problems may be the most important aspect of your selfcare. Here are some tips that could help keep you out of trouble:

- ◆ **Prevent Infection**

Infections can cause further lung damage, decrease your lungs' ability to function, and increase mucus production. Keep your resistance high by eating properly and getting enough rest. Avoid crowds during the cold and flu seasons, and avoid close contact with others who are sick. Be sure to keep home respiratory equipment clean (dirty aerosol and oxygen equipment can carry germs). If you use a room humidifier, clean it often because this type of device can become a breeding ground for germs.

- ◆ **Be Aware of Signs of Infection**

If you suspect that you have an infection, call your doctor immediately. Some signs of infection include fever, chills, chest tightness, increased shortness of breath, and a change in the color or amount of mucus.

- ◆ **Avoid Contact With Irritants**

Many things may irritate your lungs and make breathing more difficult. Some common irritants include smoke, dust, smog, fumes, aerosol sprays, cold air, excessive humidity, pollens, certain foods, and animals.

- ◆ **Look For Other Signs of Trouble**

Some things will alert you to more serious problems. Call your doctor immediately if you encounter the sudden development of swollen ankles or have frequent headaches, dizzy spells, confusion, disorientation, or slurred speech.

Take your medications properly

Keep a current list of the drugs you are taking. Write down the doses you are supposed to take and the times to take them. This will keep you from becoming confused and will serve as a quick reference should problems arise.

Do not take other people's drugs. They can cause you serious harm.

Understand how each drug works, and be aware of the possible side effects. If you have doubts, contact your doctor or pharmacist.

Do not stop taking or change the dose of a drug without first contacting your doctor. Sudden withdrawal from some drugs can cause serious medical problems. If you miss taking a dose, take it as soon as you realize the mistake, and arrange to take the next dose at the recommended time interval. Do not take a double dose to make up for the omitted dose. Check with your doctor before taking over-the-counter remedies that might interfere with a prescribed drug you are taking.

Properly store your drugs to prevent them from losing their effectiveness.