
Managing Your COPD

There is no cure for COPD, but there are many measures you can take to prevent COPD from getting worse, including exercising, taking medications, using oxygen therapy and attending pulmonary rehabilitation.

Keep your lungs healthy

People living with COPD should take extra care to protect their lungs and stay healthy. Some ways to stay healthy include:

- Quit smoking and avoid secondhand smoke whenever possible. Smoke irritates lungs and makes it harder to breathe.
- Eat right. People who have COPD spend more energy breathing, so proper nutrition is an important part of staying healthy and active.
- Avoid chemicals. It may help your breathing to not wear or use scented products, such as perfume or hairspray. When cleaning, avoid harsh chemicals and use scent-free, natural products, which are typically less toxic.
- Breathe clean air. Stay inside on air pollution action days, which are summer days that are hot, sunny and humid with little wind. On [air quality action days](#), harmful chemicals linger in the air and can make breathing difficult.
- Get a seasonal flu vaccination every year. Influenza and other respiratory infections can lead to serious complications in people who have lung disease..

Monitor your COPD

Because COPD gets worse over time, it is essential for people living with COPD to monitor themselves. Keeping a list of dates and times when experiencing symptoms, reactions to treatments and exercise and making notes about visits with a health care provider can help people manage COPD more effectively.

Exercise

Exercise is essential to managing COPD. Without exercise, COPD can become more severe and breathing can become more difficult. Exercise strengthens all muscles, including the ones used to breathe, can improve and maintain lung function, and makes people who have COPD feel more confident in their ability to complete everyday activities and maintain their independence.

There are many things that people living with COPD can do on their own to exercise. Simple routines can be performed at home without any sophisticated exercise equipment, including walking, dancing and yoga.

It is important to speak to a health care provider before beginning an exercise program. A health care provider can discuss what kinds of exercises are right for you and what will work best for your COPD. Also consider joining a [pulmonary rehabilitation group](#).

Therapy with medications

For people who have COPD, medications can be used to relieve symptoms, stop the disease from progressing or to treat an infection. Most people who have COPD take medications on a regular basis to make their breathing easier. Other medications are only taken as needed to decrease sudden shortness of breath or treat an infection.

Medications prescribed for COPD typically fall into three categories:

- **bronchodilators**, which are usually inhalers designed to open up the patient's airways and help in making breathing easier
- **steroids** to reduce inflammation in the airways
- **antibiotics** to treat infections.

To learn more, view [Managing COPD: Medications](#) page.

Oxygen therapy

Many people who have COPD need constant use of supplemental oxygen. Because damaged or blocked lungs do not properly absorb oxygen, they often cannot distribute enough oxygen to the rest of the body. Without sufficient oxygen, the rest of a person's organs are unable to work properly.

Supplemental oxygen increases the amount of pure oxygen a person breathes in, so the lungs have more oxygen to absorb and distribute to the rest of the body. By getting the most oxygen possible, breathing is easier and a person is able to do more activities without becoming short of breath.

To learn more, view [Managing COPD: Oxygen Therapy](#) page.

Pulmonary rehabilitation

Pulmonary rehabilitation is a six to twelve week program that includes education, exercise and therapy for people living with lung disease. The goal of pulmonary rehabilitation is to reduce symptoms, improve quality of life and increase physical and emotional participation in daily activities. Pulmonary rehabilitation has been shown to improve shortness of breath, improve quality of life scores and reduce the number of hospitalizations and days in the hospital for people living with lung disease.

To learn more or find a pulmonary rehabilitation group near you, visit [Pulmonary Rehabilitation & Support Groups](#) page.

Lung volume reduction surgery

Lung volume reduction surgery is an operation that removes parts of the lungs that are not working properly. By removing the most damaged parts of the lungs, those that are unable to efficiently process oxygen, the rest of the lungs and the surrounding muscles are able to work more efficiently.

People who have COPD with severe lung damage may be candidates for lung volume reduction surgery. To learn more, view [Managing COPD: Lung Volume Reduction Surgery](#) page.

Lung transplants

People who have COPD can be candidates for lung transplants. Transplants can be recommended for people who have very severe symptoms, have difficulty breathing most of the time or have no relief of symptoms from medical therapy.

Lung transplantation involves giving a person with COPD a lung from a person who has recently died. A single-lung transplant is done more often than a double-lung transplant, and both can be effective methods to improve breathing for people with COPD.

To learn more, visit [Managing COPD: Lung Transplants](#) page.

SOURCE: Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago.
<http://www.lungchicago.org/managing-copd>