

Home exercises for COPD

FACT SHEET prepared by the Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ

If you have COPD physical activity is very important in helping you to keep well. It should be an important part of your day, even though you may get breathless during activity. By including physical activity in your day, your muscles, joints and circulation will become more efficient and your body will use oxygen better. It helps you take control of your condition. By getting fit you will also become less breathless.

Physical activity should be a pleasure, so you should choose something that you enjoy. Aim to do 20-30 minutes of physical activity a day, three to four times a week. Walking, swimming or riding an exercycle may be enjoyable ways to exercise both your upper and lower body. Regular walking is one of the best exercises that someone with COPD can do!

Begin any programme at a comfortable pace, which enables you to control your breathing and talk if you want to. Start with a short distance initially, with as many rests as you need. Mild to moderate breathlessness will not harm you.

The exercises below may be done sitting or standing. Time these exercises to suit your own rate of breathing. If you get breathless rest in a position with your shoulders supported and wait until the breathlessness eases. If any of these exercises cause you pain you should stop and get some advice from your doctor or physiotherapist.

Choose some of the following exercises to do as well as walking:

Upper Body

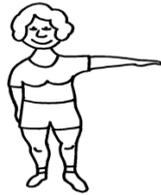
- Arm raising - Raise one arm above head, as you breathe out. Hold and slowly lower your elbow to waist level again, while breathing in. Repeat with the same arm and then swap to the opposite arm. (In time, consider adding a weight e.g. a can of baked beans.



- Elbow circles - Sit or stand with your feet slightly apart. Place hands on shoulders, with elbows at shoulder level. Circle elbows forwards, up and out. Breathe out as elbows move forward and up and breathe in when returning to starting position.



- Arm extensions - Begin with arms by sides. While breathing out, lift right arm up to shoulder level keeping arm straight (like a bird flying). Return arm to side while breathing in. Repeat with other arm.



Lower Body

- Leg lifts - Sit with feet slightly apart. Lift one knee up towards your shoulder as you breathe out. Breathe in as you return your knee to the starting position.



- Knee extensions - Sit with feet slightly apart. Straighten one knee as you breathe out. Breathe in as your foot returns to the starting position.



- Step ups - Find a small step near something you can hold on to. Breathe out as you step up onto the step. Breathe in as you step down. Occasionally change the leg which goes up first.

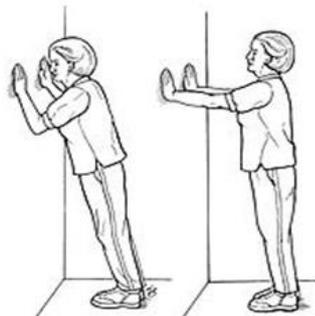


- Sit to stands - Sit in the chair of your choice. Slide forward as far as possible. Move your feet back so your heels are lined up with the front edge of the chair. Lean well forward – nose over toes. Push down and drive through your legs to stand up. Lightly use your hands on the chair if necessary. Breathe out as you stand up. Do five to 10 repetitions two times a day.



Strength

- Push-ups - Stand with feet hip width apart and place hands on the wall at shoulder height about 30" apart. Pull tummy button in towards spine and drop chest into wall keeping your back straight. Push away from the wall back to the starting position. Breathe out gently with pursed lips.



Thoracic Mobility

- Side bend - Place right arm across body with right hand on left lower ribs. While breathing in slowly (through your nose), bend over to your left, dropping left hand towards the floor. Breathe out through pursed lips as you return to upright. Repeat this exercise with left arm.



- Hand behind head - Stretch right arm above head, then bend right elbow and lower right hand to back of neck. Then, straighten elbow again and stretch hand upward to return to starting position. Repeat 3 times and then repeat with left arm above head.



The Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ can help you

The Asthma and Respiratory Foundation is New Zealand's not-for-profit sector authority on asthma and other respiratory illnesses. We advocate to government and raise awareness of respiratory illnesses, fund research for better treatments and educate on best practice. Check out our comprehensive website at asthmaandrespiratory.org.nz

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