

# Exercise and COPD

Enjoying a More Active Lifestyle



**COPD**  
FOUNDATION

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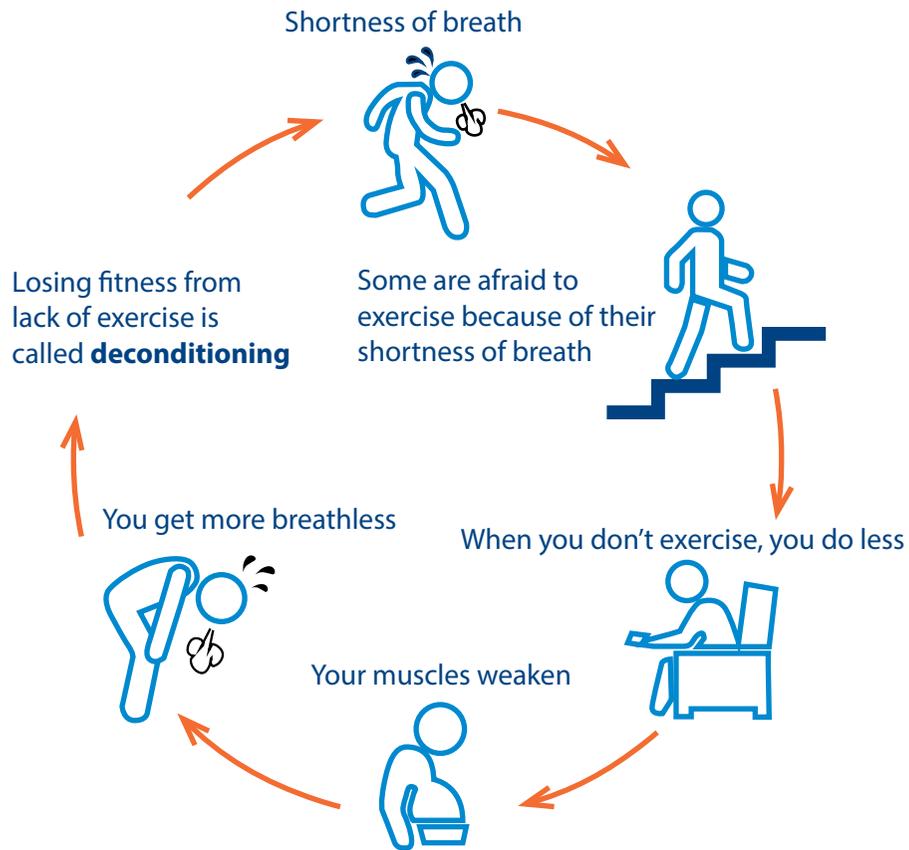
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# EXERCISE AND COPD

If you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), you may think that you can't exercise. But if done correctly and safely, exercise is one of the best things you can do to help manage your COPD. It will help you to be less short of breath, increase the amount of exercise you can do, and improve your overall health.

Almost all people with COPD have:



The information in this guide is not meant to replace a medical checkup, information, or advice from your health care provider. You should always check with your health care provider before starting an exercise program.

# PULMONARY REHABILITATION

If you have COPD, your health care provider may recommend special exercise and educational programs for people with COPD. One of these programs is called pulmonary rehabilitation or pulmonary rehab. One of the main components of pulmonary rehabilitation is exercise.

In addition to exercise, pulmonary rehab includes education about COPD and group support. It will help you manage your COPD and be more self-sufficient. At pulmonary rehab, you will work with a team of professionals who have experience with patients with shortness of breath. They will teach you how to manage your COPD so you can feel better and improve how much exercise you can do, your quality of life, and your ability to stay active when the program is finished.

One of the best things about joining a pulmonary rehabilitation is meeting other people with COPD who have similar experiences, feelings, and challenges.

To qualify for pulmonary rehab, you must be referred by your health care provider. Medicare covers most of the cost. Some insurance companies may not cover the cost of pulmonary rehab. If this happens, your health care provider can send a letter explaining why you need the program.

## GETTING STARTED WITH PULMONARY REHAB

When you first start pulmonary rehab, the team will take your health history and talk with you about your current level of activity. They will help you set goals based on the things that are most important to you. They will monitor your heart rate, blood pressure, and oxygen level during exercise sessions and make sure you are exercising safely.

In your pulmonary rehab program, you will learn about:

- Breathing and relaxation techniques
- Medications for managing COPD
- Oxygen needs, both at rest and during exercise
- Travel tips
- Ways to cope with your COPD



## STARTING AN EXERCISE PROGRAM ON YOUR OWN

If you don't qualify for pulmonary rehab, you can still increase your daily activity and exercise on your own. Exercise can make you feel better and help you to breathe easier. Often, exercise improves your mood and helps you to sleep better. To start an exercise program, think about what you like to do. It is easier to stick with an exercise program if you enjoy it.

To make exercise more fun, you can:

- Ask a friend or family member to join you.
- Join a specialized exercise program such as Silver Sneakers or support group such as a Better Breathers Club.
- Try an exercise class or work with a trainer at a gym who has experience working with people who have lung conditions.
- Watch an exercise video at home.
- Play your favorite music and move to the beat.
- Try walking at a mall or recreation center.

## WHAT IS A GOOD EXERCISE PROGRAM?

A good exercise program is one you enjoy and will do on a regular basis. Some important exercises for people with COPD include:

### Stretching

Doing the right stretches improves your flexibility and lowers the chance you will get hurt while exercising. It is good to stretch five times a week. Breathe in before you stretch and breathe out as you hold the stretch. Hold each stretch for 10 to 30 seconds, if possible. Repeat each stretch three to five times.

### Endurance Exercising

An endurance exercise is one that gets your heart and lungs working harder. These can include riding a bike, taking a walk, pedaling with your arms, or doing steps at home or on a machine.

When you start an endurance exercise, you should start out slow and easy. Each week, you can do a little more exercise, even if it's just one or two more minutes. Pretty soon, you'll be feeling better and breathing better! But don't stop then, because "if you don't use it, you lose it!" Keep that energy up by doing your exercise at least three days a week. And don't forget to cool down for a few minutes after each exercise session.

### Muscle strengthening

Stronger muscles will help you be more active. Muscle strengthening can be done using weights or resistance bands. Elastic bands have different colors with different degrees of difficulty. With your bands, you can do muscle strengthening exercises for the upper body and lower body. Strengthening leg muscles will help you walk farther for a longer period of time. Strengthening your arms and shoulders will help you get dressed, take a shower, and do housework more easily.



*As a general rule, repeat each strength exercise 5 to 10 times (10 repetitions or "reps"). When that becomes easy, add a pound of weight. Do not add more repetitions.*

## USING OXYGEN WITH EXERCISE

If you use oxygen, you will need to use it during exercise. Set your flow rate as directed by your health care provider about five minutes before you begin exercising. If the exercise is too intense for you, your oxygen flow rate may need to be adjusted, but only make changes if your health care provider has told you to do so. Never change your flow rate on your own. When in doubt, avoid that activity and check with your health care provider.

*If you become tired, dizzy, or breathless, or if you feel your heart racing and have chest pain, stop exercising and contact your health care provider. Listen to your body and don't overwork yourself while exercising.*



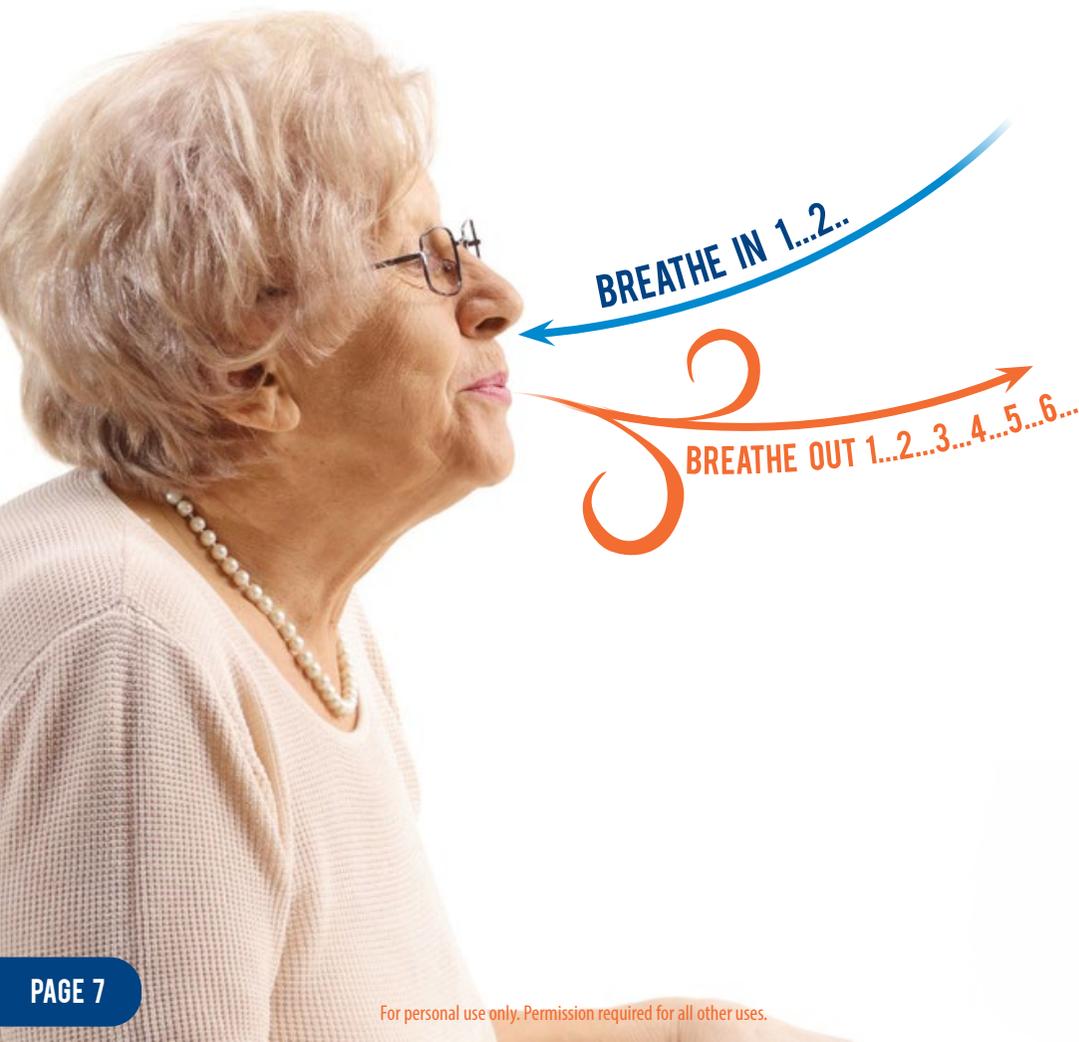
# BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Breathing techniques can help you to reduce your shortness of breath and improve anxiety. There are two main types of breathing exercises:

## 1. Pursed lip Breathing (PLB)

This breathing technique keeps your airways open longer, lessening your shortness of breath. It also helps you focus, slow your breathing, and reduce anxiety. Pursed lip breathing should be used during and after exercise or after any activity that makes you short of breath.

To do pursed lip breathing:

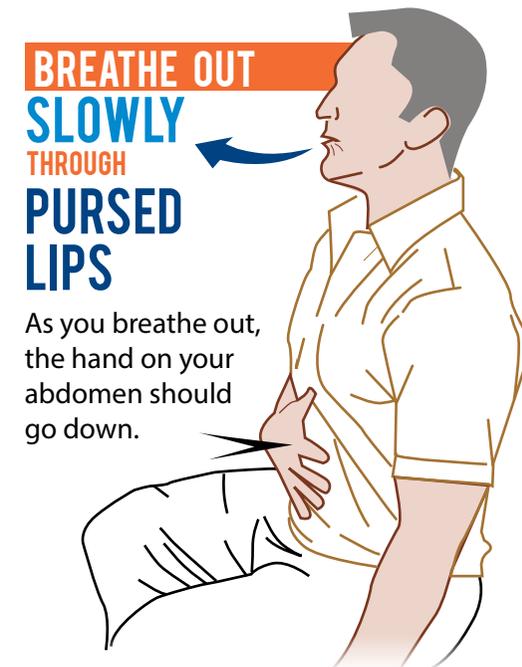
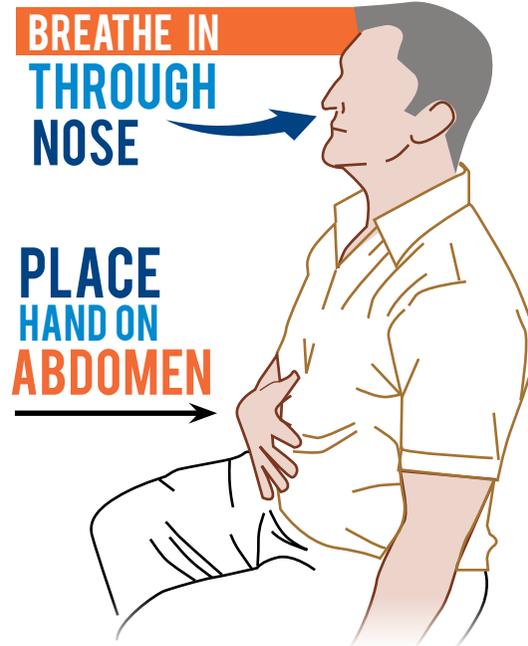
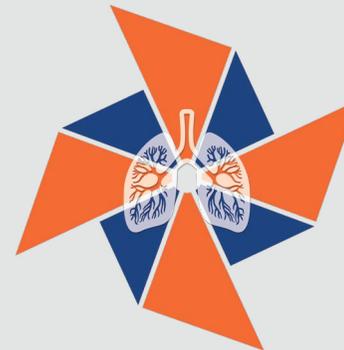


# BREATHING FROM THE DIAPHRAGM

This type of breathing is also called abdominal or "belly" breathing. Your diaphragm is your main breathing muscle.

To do diaphragmatic breathing, start by lying on your back (when you become more comfortable with the technique, you can try it sitting, standing, and while doing activity).

As you become more comfortable with this type of breathing, you can use it to lessen your feelings of shortness of breath during your daily activities.



**BREATHE OUT SLOWLY THROUGH PURSED LIPS**

As you breathe out, the hand on your abdomen should go down.

## EXERCISING SAFELY

Exercising at a moderate level will help you increase your endurance. This means it will help you be able to do more for a longer period of time. Moderate exercise also helps improve how your lungs and heart work.



### When Is It Not Okay for Me to Exercise?

Before starting an exercise program, show these lists to your health care provider and talk about your personal situation. Together, add your own "safe" and "not safe" symptoms to this list.

Yes, safe to exercise:

- I feel tired.
- I have a mild headache.
- I am having a bad day.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

No, not safe to exercise:

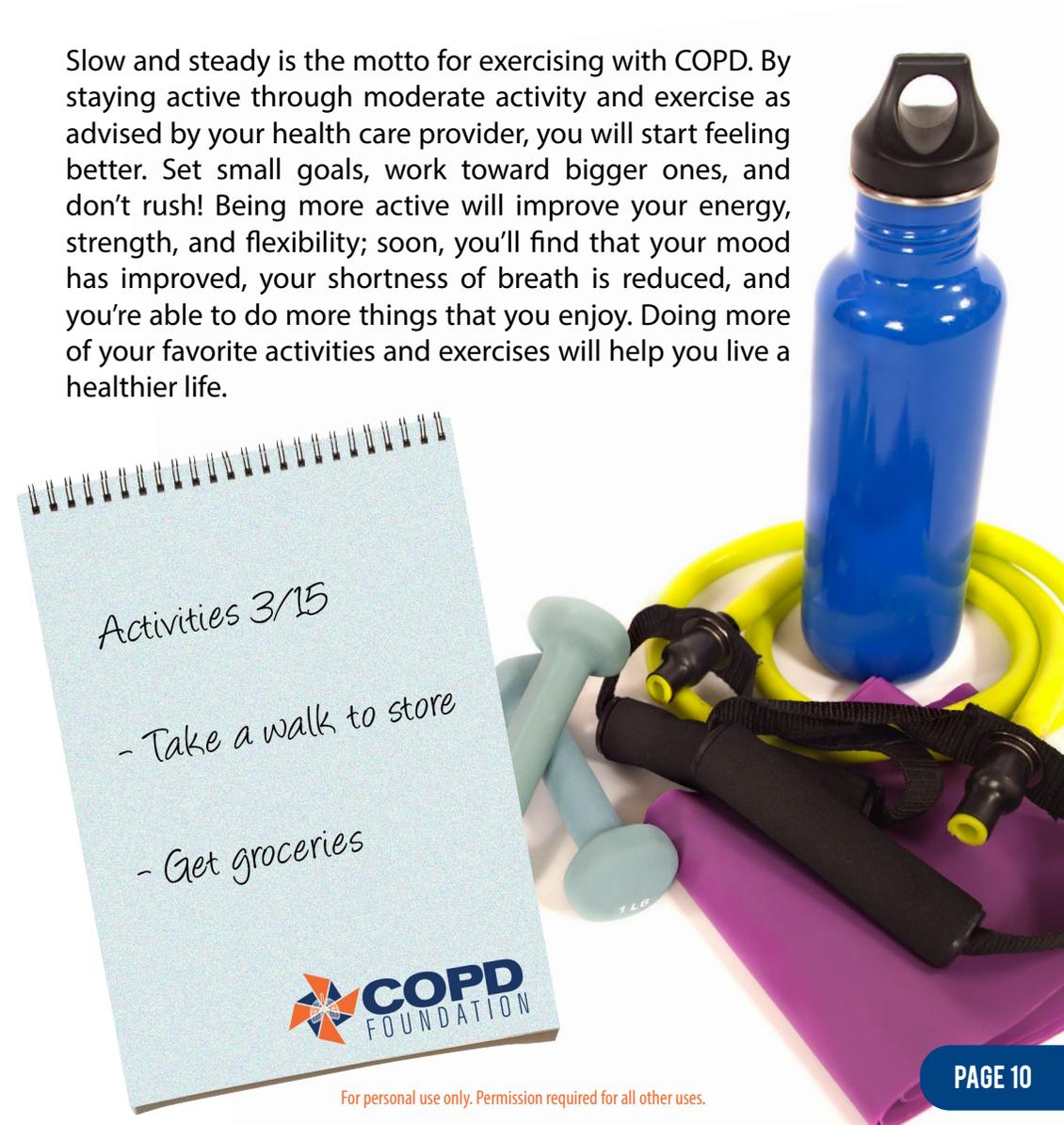
- I feel sick to my stomach.
- I am having unexpected leg or chest pain.
- I am out of oxygen.
- I have a fever or feel sick.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## SETTING GOALS

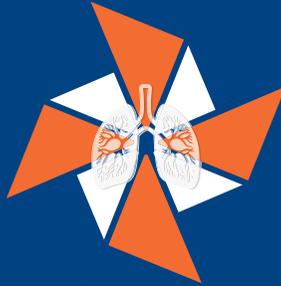
When starting a new exercise plan, many people find it helpful to set goals. You can set goals with the help of your health care provider. Set a small goal to work toward and reward yourself when you reach it. Maybe your smaller goal is walking to your neighbor's house a few doors down. Once you are able to reach that goal, make another! Working through those smaller goals will help you reach your main goal. Pretty soon, you'll be taking those longer walks you've been working toward!

### YOU CAN DO IT!

Slow and steady is the motto for exercising with COPD. By staying active through moderate activity and exercise as advised by your health care provider, you will start feeling better. Set small goals, work toward bigger ones, and don't rush! Being more active will improve your energy, strength, and flexibility; soon, you'll find that your mood has improved, your shortness of breath is reduced, and you're able to do more things that you enjoy. Doing more of your favorite activities and exercises will help you live a healthier life.







# COPD

## FOUNDATION

Miami, FL | Washington, DC

[www.copdfoundation.org](http://www.copdfoundation.org)

COPD360 Community Support Line:  
1-866-316-COPD (2673)

Bronchiectasis and NTM Information Line:  
1-833-411-LUNG (5864)

This guide has been reviewed by members of the  
COPD Foundation Guides for Better Living Review Team