

COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)



What can you do to manage your COPD?

You can do a lot to help manage your condition yourself. Keeping active and doing exercise can make a big difference – many people find this helps them more than inhaled drugs.

This section explains the benefits of:

- ▶ [keeping active](#)
- ▶ [learning how to control your breathing](#)
- ▶ [eating well and keeping a healthy weight](#)
- ▶ [taking care of your emotional wellbeing](#)

Also find out [what else you can do](#) and where you can [find more information](#) on managing your condition.

“If you have a lung condition, you can’t sit around and wait for other people to take care of you – you need to take care of yourself! I fully believe you get out of it what you put in” **Peter**

Keeping active

If you have COPD, being active and exercising can help you to improve your breathing, fitness and quality of life. Don’t avoid activities that make you breathless: you’ll get less fit and out of breath more easily. Regular exercise can help reverse this by strengthening your muscles. Exercise also benefits your heart and blood pressure, and makes you less likely to develop conditions such as diabetes and osteoporosis (fragile bone disease).

There are many different ways to be active – find one that you might enjoy.

Some ideas for getting active »

The best way to learn how to exercise at the right level for you is to take part in [pulmonary rehabilitation](#). Ask your doctor to refer you.

There is strong evidence that people with COPD benefit from PR and exercise more generally. Remember again that it is not harmful to make yourself breathless.

Controlling your breathing

There are [techniques and positions](#) that can help you cope when you get out of breath and feel more in control of your breathing.

If you practise breathing techniques and use them every day, they'll help you when you're active or if you suddenly feel short of breath. Try different breathing techniques to find what helps you. There are also positions that can help you to practise breathing control or to control your breathing when you get breathless. Talk to your respiratory physiotherapist or nurse to find out what works for you.

Some people with COPD who joined a singing group said singing helped them to manage their symptoms better.

[Find out more and find a group near you](#)

[Have a look at the techniques and positions »](#)

tip

Top tips to manage your breathlessness



- ▶ Use a towelling robe after showering or bathing, as you'll use less energy than drying off with a towel.
- ▶ Using a handheld battery-powered fan to blow air onto your face can help you to feel less breathless.
- ▶ Plan your day in advance to make sure you have plenty of opportunities to rest.
- ▶ Find simple ways to cook, clean and do other chores. You could use a small table or cart with wheels to move things around your home, and a pole or tongs with long handles to reach things.
- ▶ Put items that you use frequently in easy-to-reach places.
- ▶ Keep your clothes loose, and wear clothes and shoes that are easy to put on and take off.
- ▶ Using a wheeled walking frame can make it easier to get around if you are short of breath.

Eating well and keeping a healthy weight

It's important to eat a balanced diet and maintain a healthy weight. Your doctor or nurse can help you to work out what your healthy weight should be and can refer you to a dietician or local scheme to help you if necessary.

If you're overweight it will be harder for you to breathe and move around.

If you're losing too much weight because eating makes you feel breathless, or find it difficult to shop and prepare meals, try to eat little and often. Ask your doctor or nurse about nutritional supplements

Read more information on [eating well, maintaining a healthy weight and how your diet can affect your symptoms](#).

Take care of your emotional wellbeing

Living with a long-term condition can affect many aspects of your life. Physical symptoms such as breathlessness and coughing, feeling more tired and being less active can mean you feel stressed, anxious or depressed.

The risk of anxiety and depression is greater in people with more severe COPD, people who have been admitted to hospital, and those with low oxygen levels.

Treatment is available to support you. Many other people have experienced anxiety and depression and have recovered. They are both very normal reactions to living with COPD. Talk to your health care professional about medications and counselling.

Don't bottle things up – talking to someone you trust, including your health care professional, can help. It's very important to stay active and sociable, and to learn more about COPD. This will help you to understand and cope better with your condition. You might want to get involved with a local group to meet others going through a similar experience.

Have a look at our information about [looking after your mental health](#).

Our support groups are for people living with a lung condition and their family. It's a great way to get more information and make new friends.

You can find your local group here. »

What else can I do to manage my COPD better?

- **Sleep and rest:** make sure you sleep well and get enough rest every day. This will help with your energy levels. For advice about how to get a good night's sleep, have a look at the [NHS site](#). Talk to your health care professional if that doesn't help.
- **Ask for help if you need it:** ask your health care professional about ways you can adapt your home to help you move around more easily. An occupational therapist and your local council can help you with this.

- **Be aware of your symptoms:** if your ankles swell, tell your health care professional. Medicines can help reduce this. But many people with COPD have other conditions, and leg swelling or a rapid heartbeat can be a sign of a heart condition.
 - **Plan ahead:** it's important to talk to your doctor or nurse about longer-term treatments and advance care planning. This means thinking about what you would like to happen if your condition gets worse, or you experience more severe flare-ups, to help your family and your doctor to understand your wishes. Find more information on [advance care planning and taking control of your choices](#).
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Further information:

tip

If you smoke, stopping smoking is the best thing you can do. [Find out about the support you can get to help you stop smoking.](#)

Sex and COPD

Having an illness like COPD can affect any relationship. It can make you feel tired, anxious or depressed. You might worry about sex if you are afraid that you will become too short of breath, or need to cough up sputum. Your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist can help you to manage this.

[More information on sex and breathlessness »](#)

Looking after someone with COPD

If you care for a family member or partner, it is important to continue to enjoy things together and for the person with COPD to keep as active and independent as they can.

[Read our information for carers »](#)

Financial help

If you have COPD, or you care for someone who does, then you might be entitled to financial support.

[Read about financial help here »](#)

[Next: Managing COPD flare-ups >](#)

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This information uses the best available medical evidence and was produced with the support of people living with lung conditions. Find out [how we produce our information](#). If you'd like to see our references [get in touch](#).

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