

# Pulmonary rehabilitation - exercise and education programme

Pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) is an exercise and education programme for people with lung disease who have symptoms of breathlessness. It is one of the best treatments for people with COPD.

Pulmonary rehabilitation helps you to stay active if you have COPD. It can help and support you to manage your COPD and live better with it.

The aim of the programme is to:

- help you to understand and manage your condition and symptoms
- increase your confidence and ability to cope with your shortness of breath and other symptoms
- improve your muscle strength and fitness
- improve your quality of life
- help to reduce the number of times you may have to go to hospital

## Pulmonary rehabilitation courses

The courses are usually held in your local hospital, health centre or leisure centre. A virtual class may also be an option for you if you are unable to travel depending on where you live.

You may be able to bring a family member or carer with you to the course.

A course of PR usually lasts 8 weeks, with 2 sessions of about 2 hours each week.

This is made up of 1 hour of exercise and 1 hour of education. The size of the class will depend on your location.

## How to access the course

Your consultant, GP, practice nurse or respiratory team will need to refer you to a PR programme in your area.

There may be a waiting list but you can improve your fitness while you are waiting for the programme to begin.

[How you can improve your fitness](#)

The exercise is tailored to meet your ability and needs. The exercise classes are supervised by a respiratory physiotherapist and nurse.

## The pulmonary rehabilitation programme

The PR team will assess your health and abilities. They will ask questions to understand you and your body so they can help you get the best out of the course.

An exercise programme is designed for you to suit your level of fitness. The programme also includes educational classes on different areas of respiratory care.

These include:

- breathing techniques
- managing anxiety
- relaxation
- medicines management
- self-management plans
- home exercise plans
- dietary advice
- saving your energy

Exercises may include gentle walking and exercises you do sitting down, or faster walking, step-ups and using an exercise bike.

In a group setting, you will do exercises based on your own ability. You will not be expected to keep up with others as everyone has a different levels of fitness and symptoms.

The level of exercise is increased gradually over the course of the programme and as you become fitter. By the end of the programme, you should be less short of breath and better able to cope with your normal daily activities.

When the course finishes, the physiotherapist or nurse will do another assessment. This is to see how it compares with the one taken at the beginning of the course. They will share this information with you and the person who referred you to the programme.

## After pulmonary rehabilitation

You will need to continue with an exercise programme at home after you finish the course. The physiotherapist will give you a plan for you to do at home. There may be local groups that you can join to help you maintain your fitness.

COPD Support Ireland offer a [12 week COPD exercise programme - copd.ie](https://www.copd.ie/12-week-copd-exercise-programme).

Get a list of local support groups and other resources from [COPD Support Ireland](https://www.copd.ie).

## Video-based support programme

If you are not able to do face-to-face rehabilitation classes you may be able to do a virtual class if available and safe to do so.

The PR team may use educational video supports such as the [HSE pulmonary rehabilitation education support programme](#).

The videos cover a range of topics including:

- breathing exercises
- oxygen therapy
- nutrition
- psychological supports for people
- promoting self-management and coping skills for people living with a major chronic disease

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