Yes! Exercise is good for everyone, but it’s especially important for people with COPD. In fact, it’s one of the most powerful tools we have for managing COPD – second only to quitting smoking.

**How can exercise help me?**

You already know that breathing is tough physical work for someone with COPD. And when every breath is a chore, it’s tempting to take it easy. But as you become less and less physically active, your muscles (including your heart) become less and less efficient. That means they not only use more oxygen, they actually have to work harder to do the same jobs – leaving you more tired and breathless. Regular exercise can help break this ‘vicious cycle of breathlessness’ by helping your heart, lungs, and muscles to work as efficiently as possible, so you can do more activities with the same amount of effort.

But the benefits don’t stop there. Regular exercise can help you reach a healthy weight. It also strengthens your bones, and your body’s ability to fight off infection. Becoming more physically active can also increase your energy level, boost your mood, and help you maintain or regain your independence. And being as fit as possible can reduce the odds that your COPD symptoms will worsen, which can help keep you out of the hospital.
But I get tired and breathless so easily. How can I possibly exercise?

Don’t let the word ‘exercise’ scare you – if you have COPD, simple walking is one of the best ways of increasing your fitness level. It’s easy, inexpensive, and can be done anywhere, at any time of year – in your hallway, at the nearby mall, or in a local park.

The trick is starting slowly, gradually doing a little more or working a little harder as you become fitter and stronger. Sticking with it is also important – you have to exercise regularly to reap the benefits. Remember, any amount of exercise is better than none at all. And small steps are better than no steps!

Getting started can be tough. You know you should exercise – but you don’t feel great. Plus you may feel anxious about becoming short of breath. That’s where the Lung Association can help. They can direct you to a Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program, (an exercise program specially designed for people with COPD) or a support group in your community. (For more information on pulmonary rehabilitation, check out The Lung Association Fact sheet: Pulmonary Rehabilitation.) Or, if one of these programs isn’t available in your area, The Lung Association can provide tips to help you get moving on your own.

What else should I keep in mind before deciding when and how to exercise?

Here are some tips that make exercise as easy and pleasant as possible – and help keep you on track.

1. Set goals

Setting a goal is the first step towards achieving it. If you want to walk for ten minutes, make that your goal. Work with your doctor to establish goals that are reasonable for you and your health. Write them down in your preventative maintenance plan.

2. Personalize your pace

Make sure your exercise plan is tailored to your fitness level and breathing ability. Start with the level of exercising YOU are comfortable with.

3. Build up slowly

Don’t push yourself too hard, but try to go a little further, or exercise a little longer every few days. That way you will increase the efficiency of your body and its muscles.

4. Alternate activities

When you have COPD, you need strength in all your muscles. But you may not have the breath to exercise all your muscles at once. Exercise your arm muscles one day, and your leg muscles the next. That way, you’ll get a complete workout without overtiring yourself.
5. Schedule wisely
Plan to exercise when you know your energy level will be high – shortly after taking your medications, perhaps. Also pick a time that your stomach isn’t full – either before a meal, or an hour or two after eating. Once you figure out what works best for you, try treating your regular exercise time like you would an appointment, organizing the rest of your day around it. If you start wondering whether you have enough time to exercise – you’ll find an excuse not to! Eventually exercising will become as much as part of your routine as brushing your teeth.

6. Listen to your body
If you are overtired or feeling sick, you may need to limit your exercising for that day. If you have a big event one day, think about cutting your usual exercise time in half, or postponing your walk until the next day.

7. Dress for comfort
Wear loose-fitting clothing. Dress in layers, so you can take off a sweater if you get too hot. Choose shoes that fasten easily, and offer good support as well as ample cushioning – a good-quality pair of cross-trainers or walking shoes with Velcro® fasteners is ideal.

8. Watch weather and pollution
Avoid exercising outdoors if pollution levels are high or the weather is too cold, too hot, or too humid. If possible, plan to exercise indoors on those days.

9. Treat yourself
To stay motivated, give yourself a little reward after exercising – coffee with a friend, for example. Or buy yourself that CD or book you’ve been wanting, but only after you’ve stuck with your program for two weeks.

Exercise regularly
You’ll lose the benefits of exercise unless you do it regularly. Make fitness a priority, and set aside specific times during the week to exercise. Aim for at least three times per week. Even a small amount of exercise is better than none at all – as long as you do it consistently.

On the other hand, if you do have to discontinue exercising for some time due to illness or any other reason, don’t get discouraged. Start again slowly, and you will gradually regain your muscle conditioning.

Find the fun!
The key to staying active is finding an activity you enjoy – you’ll be more likely to keep going if exercise feels more like fun than work.

Like to dance? Sign up for lessons. Love the water? Call your community pool or local Y to find out if aquafit classes are available. Always wanted to try yoga or Tai Chi? Contact your community centre to see whether they offer an introductory course. Make a regular walking date with a friend – it’s a great excuse to visit, and you’re more likely to get out of the house if someone is expecting you!

Prefer to exercise on your own? Listen to lively music while you work through your routine, or consider investing in a treadmill or stationary bike so you can watch your favourite TV program while you walk or pedal.
I want to design my own workout. What do I need to know?

First of all, a fitness routine for someone with COPD should include three main kinds of exercise:

1. Flexibility
2. Aerobic
3. Strengthening

Examples of each of these kinds of exercise are shown below. You can use them to create your own exercise routine. Remember to get your doctor’s approval before starting this or any other exercise program.

1. Flexibility Exercise

Regular stretching is an important part of every exercise routine. It helps keep your muscles flexible and relaxed, and makes your joints move more freely. Stretching can also prevent soreness, and relieve tension and strain. First, warm up your muscles by walking in place or strolling slowly for a few minutes. Then do some gentle stretches before moving on to the main part of your workout. Don’t forget to do some cool-down stretching at the end of your routine – this will gradually bring down your heart rate and blood pressure. As you stretch, try not to hold your breath. Instead, breathe slowly and naturally.

These exercises allow you to reduce stiffness and increase your range of motion. It is important when doing these exercises to feel a stretching sensation, possibly with slight discomfort, but not pain.

Back Thigh Stretch – Sit with your back straight, one foot flat on the floor, and the other foot extended in front of you with the heel on the floor and the toes pointing upward.

- Reach down to touch your foot, calf or knee (as far as you are able without pain).
- Remember, bend from the hip, not from the back.
- You should feel a stretch in the back of the thigh.
- Hold this position for 30 seconds. Work up to holding the position for 60 seconds.
- Stretch the back of the other thigh in the same way.
- Repeat 3 times on each leg.

Buttock Stretch – Sit with your back straight and one ankle placed on the knee of the opposite leg.

- Bend forward at the waist.
- You should feel a stretch in the buttock.
- Hold this position for 30 to 60 seconds.
- Stretch the other side of the buttock in the same way.
- Repeat 3 times on each leg.
Shoulder Stretch – Sit or stand with your back straight and one hand placed on the outside of the elbow of the opposite arm.

- Pull the elbow gently across the chest.
- You should feel a stretch in the shoulder of the arm being pulled.
- Hold this stretch for 30 to 60 seconds.
- Stretch the other shoulder in the same way.
- Repeat 3 times on each arm.

Front Thigh Stretch – Stand resting one hand on a wall or on the back of a chair for balance.

- Hold your ankle or the hem of your trousers with your hand and pull up gently.
- You should feel a stretch in the front of the thigh.
- Hold this position for 30 to 60 seconds.
- Stretch the other thigh in the same way.
- Repeat 3 times on each leg.
There are many possibilities for aerobic exercise. Pick the activities that you enjoy the most; ask a friend or family member to join you, and start today!

**Shoulder and Chest Stretch** – Stand with one hand and forearm placed against a wall. The forearm should be level with the shoulder. The elbow should be slightly behind the shoulder.
- Turn your head away from the wall.
- You should feel a stretch in your arm and chest.
- Hold this stretch for 30 to 60 seconds.
- Stretch the other side of the chest in the same way.
- Repeat 3 times on each arm.

**Palm Down Forearm Stretch** – Sit or stand with your back straight and one arm extended in front of you with the palm facing down.
- With your other hand, gently push down on the back of the extended hand.
- You should feel a stretch in the forearm.
- Hold this position for 30 to 60 seconds.
- Stretch the other palm in the same manner.
- Repeat 3 times on each hand.

**Palm Up Forearm Stretch** – Sit or stand with your back straight and one arm extended in front of you with the palm facing up.
- With the other hand, gently push down on the fingers of the extended hand.
- You should feel a stretch in the forearm.
- Hold this position for 30 to 60 seconds.
- Stretch the other palm in the same manner.
- Repeat 3 times on each hand.

**Neck Stretch** – Sit or stand with your back straight and your feet flat on the floor.
- Tilt your head to one side.
- Push down on opposite hand.
- You should feel a stretch in the side of the neck opposite the tilt.
- Hold this position for 30 to 60 seconds.
- Stretch the other side of the neck in the same manner.
- Repeat 3 times on each side.
2. Aerobic exercise

By increasing the heart rate for a sustained period, aerobic exercise makes your heart muscle stronger and more efficient, so your body uses less oxygen to do the same amount of work. Swimming, walking, stair climbing, pedaling a stationary bicycle, and dancing are all great forms of aerobic exercise.

Riding a bicycle – Riding a bicycle can be an enjoyable activity! Cycling can increase your heart and lung fitness as well as increasing your strength and stamina. It can be a part of your exercise program. You can begin at your own pace and increase your speed and distance as you are able. Like any aerobic activity, cycling can help to build endurance, maintain a healthy weight, and reduce stress and risk of developing other health problems such as diabetes. Cycling also is a useful method of transportation, saves the cost of fuel and reduces pollution.

Swimming – Swimming is an activity for those who enjoy water. It is beneficial for those who may have difficulty walking or jogging because of hip or knee discomfort. Swimming is a great aerobic exercise alternative that works your whole body. It improves aerobic conditioning, muscle strength, endurance and flexibility all at the same time. Other benefits may include: lower risk of injury and improved posture.
Can I just walk my way to better fitness?

Yes. Follow these simple steps:

**Pick the place**

Decide where you will walk. Choose a place that has areas where you can rest, and that you can get to easily. Even if you like to walk outdoors, it’s a good idea to think of another, indoor location for days when the pollution count is high, or when the weather is hot, humid, snowy, or windy. Malls and apartment hallways are just two possibilities. You can even try creating a track in your own house!

**Start slowly.**

Begin with a short walk every day. Go only as far as you can without becoming uncomfortably short of breath, but remember to save enough energy to get back to where you started.

**Pace yourself.**

When you become short of breath, stop and rest before continuing. When necessary, practice pursed-lip breathing: Breathe in through your nose, and blow out through your mouth as if you’re whistling. Try breathing out twice as long as it took you to breathe in. Counting to two as you inhale, and four as you exhale, can help. For more detailed instructions see The Lung Association fact sheet: **Breathlessness.**

**Step it up.**

After every few workouts, increase your walking time or distance, or step up your speed a bit. By working a little longer or harder each time, you’ll increase your fitness level, and slowly build your ability to walk for longer and longer periods.
3. Strengthening Exercise

Resistance training strengthens and conditions your muscles, so they won’t tire as quickly. Strong, fit muscles also use oxygen more efficiently, which eases the load on your lungs. For people with COPD, resistance exercises that work the upper body are especially helpful, since they strengthen the breathing muscles, too.

To build strength, you can pedal a stationary bike, perform stretches using rubber tubing, or work out with weights. But you don’t necessarily need special equipment. For example, you can strengthen your arm muscles by carrying groceries, or doing elbow bends and other upper body exercises while holding a soup tin ‘weight’.

**FOR THE FRONT OF THE THIGHS**

*Choose either A, B, or C*

**A. Leg Extension:** Sit with your back straight, your hands resting comfortably on your knees and your feet flat on the floor.
- Extend one leg straight out in front of you so that your heel is on the floor and your toes pointing upwards.
- Return the leg to its original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times for each leg.

**B. Leg Extension:** Sit with your back straight, your knees forming a 90 degree angle to the floor and your hands resting comfortably on your knees.
- Lean slightly forward and stand up from the chair to a straight position with your hands at your sides. (If the chair has armrests, use them to help you stand up if needed.)
- Return to the original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times.

**Progression:** Do this exercise holding weights in your hands.
C. Knee Lift: Stand with your back straight and your hands by your sides, or stand with one hand on a wall or a chair for balance.
- Lift one leg so the knee forms a 90 degree angle.
- Return the leg to its original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times for each leg.

B. Leg Lift: Stand with your back straight resting your hands on a wall or on the back of a chair for balance.
- Give one leg a small slow kick backwards.
- Return the leg to its original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times for each leg.

Progression: Do this exercise with weights on your ankles

FOR THE BACK OF THE THIGHS
Choose either A or B

A. Knee Bend: Stand with your back straight, resting your hands on a wall or the back of a chair for balance.
- Lift your foot out behind you so your lower leg is parallel with the floor.
- Return the foot to its original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times for each leg.

Progression: Do this exercise with weights on your ankles.

FOR THE ANKLES

Heel Lift: Sit with your back straight, your hands resting comfortably on your knees and your feet flat on the floor.
- Raise your heels.
- Return the heels to their original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times.

Progression: Do this exercise from a standing position (see 3rd photo)

Remember: strong, fit muscles use oxygen more efficiently, which eases the load on your lungs.
Arm Extension: Stand with your back straight and one arm held straight out in front of you parallel to the floor. If you need help to maintain balance, hold the back of a chair with the opposite hand.
- Pull your elbow back to form a 90 degree angle.
- Return the arm to its original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times for each arm.

Progression: Do this exercise pulling both elbows back at the same time.

Toe Lift: Sit with your back straight, your hands on your thighs and your feet flat on the floor.
- Lift the front of your feet, pointing your toes upwards
- Return the feet to their original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times.

Progression: Do this exercise from a standing position (see 3rd photo).
FOR THE ARMS

Front Elbow Bend: Sit with your back well supported, and your arms hanging straight down by your sides.

- Bend your elbow lifting the hand and forearm upwards.
- Return the arm to its original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times for each arm.

Progression 1: Do this exercise from a standing position while holding on to the back of a chair. Progression 2: Do this exercise bending both elbows at the same time. Progression 3: Do this exercise with weights in your hands.

FOR THE SHOULDERs

Side Arm Lift: Sit with your feet flat on the floor and your arms straight down at your sides.

- Lift one arm out to the side so that the arm is parallel to the floor.
- Return the arm to its original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times for each arm.

Progression 1: Do this exercise lifting both arms at the same time. Progression 2: Do this exercise with weights in your hands.

FOR THE CHEST

Standing Push-Ups: Stand facing a wall, with your feet flat on the floor far enough away from the wall so that your hands can be placed flat on it. Your hands should be at shoulder height and shoulder width apart.

- Keeping your feet flat on the floor, let your shoulders move in towards the wall.
- Return the body to its original position as if doing a push-up.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times.

Front Arm Lift: Sit with your back straight, your feet flat on the floor and your arms straight down at your sides.

- Lift your arm in front of you so that it is straight out from the shoulders and parallel to the floor.
- Return the arm to its original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times for each arm.

Progression 1: Do this exercise lifting both arms at the same time. Progression 2: Do this exercise with weights in your hands.
Back Elbow Bend: Sit with your feet flat on the floor, your back well supported, and your arm held out behind you. Bend your elbow with your palm facing back.

- Extend the lower arm straight back.
- Return the arm to its original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times for each arm.

**Progression 1:** Do this exercise from a standing position. **Progression 2:** Do this exercise extending both arms at the same time. **Progression 3:** Do this exercise with weights on your wrist.

Don’t forget to stretch after completing your aerobic and strengthening exercises.
Abdominal Contractions: Sit with your back straight, your feet flat on the floor, and your hands placed on your abdomen with your fingers pointing towards your navel.
- Contract your abdominal muscles pulling your navel inwards and breathing out at the same time.
- Release your abdomen to its original position and breathe in slowly.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times.

**Progression 1:** Do this exercise from a standing position.

Chin Pull: Sit with your back well supported, your feet flat on the floor.
- Pull your chin and head back gently.
- Return the chin to its original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times.

For increased range of movement you may want to place one finger on the middle of the chin and push gently when you pull your head and chin back.

Chin Drop: Sit with your back well supported and your feet flat on the floor.
- Bring your chin to your chest.
- Return the chin to its original position.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times.

Side Arm Lift: Sit, or stand with your back straight, your feet flat on the floor about shoulder width apart. With your upper arms down at your sides, bend your elbows and hold your hands out in front of you. Your elbows should be about level with your navel. Or, you can simply cross your arms on your chest.
- Keeping your feet and hips still, turn the top half of your body to the side.
- Return your upper body to its original position.
- Repeat, turning the top half of your body to the other side.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times for each side.

**Progression 1:** Do this exercise from a standing position.

Head Rotation: Sit with your back well supported and your feet flat on the floor.
- Turn your head to the side as if looking over one shoulder.
- Return the head to its original position.
- Repeat, turning your head to the other side.
- Repeat 5 to 15 times on each side.
Remember, you can do it!

Get the information and support you need from one of our Breathworks COPD educators.

Phone 1-866-717-COPD (2673) or visit us online at www.lung.ca/breathworks.

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