



COPD includes lung diseases such as chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Although there is no 'cure', it is usually possible to improve your health and quality of life. Physiotherapy can help.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

How can physiotherapy help?

Research shows pulmonary rehabilitation programmes are extremely effective in treating chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Physiotherapists are an essential part of the team that run these programmes.

Pulmonary rehab programmes can significantly improve health by reducing breathlessness, providing ways to control the disease and by improving the ability to carry out daily activities, such as washing and dressing. Better health leads to improvements in quality of life and a reduction in the number of re-admissions to hospital.

If you have COPD and tend to hyperventilate (breathe too quickly) or have problems clearing chest phlegm; a physio can show you breathing techniques to help.

Physios also help patients manage breathlessness, using positioning and breathing exercises, and advice on pacing activities and ways to cope.

If someone with COPD is admitted to hospital with a breathing problem, physios play a key role in helping people clear



their chest, manage their condition and get moving again. Physios can help people with their return home from hospital and in managing future flare-ups of their condition.

What happens when I see a physiotherapist?

Your first session with a physio will include a detailed assessment, advice and possibly a physical treatment. Your physio may need you to remove some clothes so they can have a good look at how you breathe. It's a good idea to dress comfortably and wear suitable underwear. Everything you tell the physiotherapist will be completely confidential.

Find a physio

Physios are the third largest health profession after doctors and nurses. They work in the NHS, in private practice, for charities and in the work-place, through occupational health schemes. Ask your GP for a referral to an NHS physio or find a private physio at: www.csp.org.uk/your-health/find-physio/access-options

How can I help myself?

There is a strong link between COPD and smoking. Your physio can advise you and put you in contact with specialists trained to help people stop smoking.

Patients who attend pulmonary rehab gain a lot of knowledge about the condition and skills to manage it. The earlier you can attend such a course the better, as you will benefit more quickly and it will make a bigger difference to your life. Ask your GP to refer you. Try to avoid lung irritants, and keep as active as possible but do things slowly. Keeping fit is still important - check with your GP or physio what activities are suitable for you.

Living with COPD may cause fear, anxiety, depression, and stress. This is perfectly understandable; tell your GP or health care team how you are feeling so that they can support you.

What is COPD?

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) includes conditions such as chronic bronchitis, emphysema and some cases of chronic asthma.

Long-term exposure to irritants, such as tobacco smoke, that damage the lungs and the airways is usually the cause of COPD. Breathing in second-hand smoke, air pollution, or chemical fumes or dust can also contribute to the development of COPD.

Top tips

- Do activities like walking up stairs slowly
- Put items that you need often in one place that's easy to reach
- Find simple ways to cook, clean, and do other chores. You could use a small trolley to move things around and tongs with long handles to reach things
- Get some help around your home to avoid climbing any stairs too often
- Keep your clothes loose, and wear clothes and shoes that are easy to put on and take off
- Your physio can advise you on exercise.

Further information

NHS Choices:

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Chronic-obstructive-pulmonary-disease/Pages/Introduction.aspx

British Lung Foundation:

www.blf.org.uk/Home

NICE (England and Wales) information for patients on NHS services:

www.nice.org.uk/nicemedialive/13029/49401/49401.pdf



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