

Using an Inhaler

Without a spacer...

Remove the cap

Shake the inhaler for 3 – 4 seconds

Place your middle finger on the sprayer

Place your thumb on the bottom of the inhaler

Stand up and tilt your head back slightly

Hold the inhaler about 1 – 2 inches from your mouth



Putting the inhaler in your mouth instead can result in losing up to 50 percent of the medicine because it hits the back of your throat and bounces out of your mouth instead of going down into your lungs.

Breathe out fully

Open your mouth

Press once on the sprayer and at the same time breathe in slowly and deeply

Hold your breath for 5 – 10 seconds

Pucker your lips and breathe out slowly

If you use more than one puff from the sprayer, wait at least 30 seconds between puffs. Shake the inhaler again and repeat the steps above.

Using an Inhaler

With a spacer...

Remove cap from inhaler

Attach the spacer to your inhaler

Shake for several seconds

Hold the inhaler with your middle finger on the sprayer

Put your index finger and thumb around the spacer

Stand up and tilt your head back slightly

Breathe out normally through your nose

Put the opening of the spacer in your mouth

Close your lips around it

Press down once on the sprayer

Breathe in through your mouth slowly and deeply – this should take 3 – 4 seconds

Hold your breath for 5 – 10 seconds

Take the spacer out of your mouth

Pucker your lips and breathe out slowly

If you use more than one puff from the sprayer, wait at least 30 seconds between puffs. Shake the inhaler again and repeat the steps above.



Relaxation Exercise

This is a good exercise for when you feel really tense or to help you get to sleep. You can practice this slow, quiet breathing to calm yourself anytime you want to, and you might find it helpful to fit it into your daily routine.

Start the exercise by closing your eyes. Put your hand on your upper abdomen. Now, take long, slow deep breaths, in through your nose and out through pursed lips. Fill your lungs and feel it push your abdomen out. You will also feel your abdomen go back down as you breathe out. Continue breathing this way throughout the exercise. Feel the tension leave with every breath.

Now we will begin tensing and relaxing major muscle groups, beginning with your feet and working up. Notice how it feels when muscles are tense. Notice how it feels when muscles are relaxed. Let your muscles feel heavy and let your whole body sink into the surface below you.

Curl your toes and lift your feet off the floor a little. Hold for a count of five. Let your feet fall loose and relax. Keep breathing slowly and deeply.

Lift your feet off the floor again and tighten the muscles of your legs by trying to point your toes up and back toward your kneecaps. Hold for a count of five. Relax and breathe.

Tighten the muscles of your thighs and bottom. Hold for a count of five. Relax and breathe.

Tense the muscles of your abdomen and chest by holding in your abdomen and tightening the muscles in your chest. Notice a tendency to hold your breath as you tense these muscles. Hold for a count of five. You may feel a natural desire to take a deep breath and release even more tension, so do that now.

Next stretch your fingers out as straight as you can. Hold for a count of five. Relax and breathe.

Make a tight fist, bend your elbow and tighten all the muscles in your arms. Hold for a count of five. Relax and breathe.

Next press your shoulder blades together, tightening the muscles in your upper back, shoulders, and neck. Hold for a count of five. Relax and breathe.

Pull your shoulders up as if you are trying to touch them to your ears. Hold for a count of five. Relax and breathe.

Lastly, tighten all the muscles of your face and head. Really scrunch up your face and hold your jaw tight. Hold for a count of five. Relax and breathe. Completely relax your jaw and let your mouth remain slightly open.

Continue to breathe deeply and slowly, letting any remaining tension flow out with breath.

Now enjoy this feeling of relaxation for awhile. In this quiet state, notice the heaviness of your muscles and the rhythm of your breathing. Remember this pleasant feeling. You can quiet your mind and body in this way anytime you do this exercise. With practice, you will be able to create this feeling just by taking a deep breath.

When you are ready, take one last deep breath and open your eyes.

Breathing Techniques

Try practicing these techniques twice a day for 5 to 10 minutes a day.

Practicing these techniques will

- Open up your airways and lungs
- Allow more oxygen to get into your body
- Strengthen muscles used for breathing

Abdominal Breathing

Lie comfortably on your back and place a pillow under your head. Bend your knees to relax your stomach.

If you get short of breath laying flat on your back, use pillows to prop yourself up until you're comfortable.

Press one hand on your stomach lightly but with enough force to create slight pressure. Rest your other hand on your chest.

Breathe in slowly through your nose, using your stomach muscles. The hand on your stomach should rise when you breathe in and fall when you breathe out. The hand on your chest should remain almost still.

Pursed Lip Breathing

Breathe in slowly through your nose. Completely fill up your lungs.

Purse your lips as if to whistle.

Breathe out very slowly through your pursed lips until you feel as though your lungs are empty of air.

Exhaling through pursed lips slows down your breathing and helps get rid of stale air trapped in your lungs.

Make sure to breathe out longer than you breathe in.

Help Slow the Damage to Your Lungs

Medical Care

Your doctor can be a strong ally in using medications and other treatments to control your COPD.

Even if you feel fine, try to see your doctor at least twice a year.

Ask your doctor to test your lungs.

Ask your doctor for a flu shot each year in the fall.

Bring a list of your medications to each visit for your doctor to review.

If your doctor prescribes new medication, write down the name, how much you are supposed to take, and when to take it.

Talk to your doctor about how your medications make you feel.

Home Environment

Keeping your home free of smoke and fumes can make it easier for you to breathe.

Plan to be away from home when there are activities that generate a lot of fumes, like painting, spraying for insects, or installing new carpet.

Leave a door or window open near your kitchen when you cook. This will allow smoke and strong smells to leave your home.

Try not to spend a lot of time near the place where you cook.

If you heat with wood or kerosene, keep a door or window open a little to get rid of the fumes.

When the air inside is smoky or smells strongly, open doors and windows.

When the air outside is dusty or very polluted, keep the doors and windows shut and avoid going outside.

Living with COPD

Get the most out of each breath by making your life at home as easy as possible.

Do things slowly. Do things while sitting down.

In your bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, and living room, put items you use frequently in one place that is easy to reach.

Find simpler ways to cook, clean, and do other chores. For instance, use a cart on wheels to move things around.

Keep your clothing loose so it's easier to breath. Wear clothing and shoes that are easy to put on and take off.

If you have a two story home, ask someone to help you move things you use frequently to the first floor so you won't have to climb the stairs as often.

Life Outside of Home

Planning ahead before you take a trip or run errands can make your day safer and more pleasurable.

Try to go out during the time of day when you feel your best. Many people feel best right after taking their medications.

If you enjoy a meal out, take time to rest after you eat.

Plan your day so that you will return home before your next dose of medicine needs to be taken.

Avoid stores during the busiest times of day.

Avoid places that have stairs.

Have the phone numbers of your doctor and people who can help you in your purse or wallet.

Bring medicine to take in case you don't feel well during your trip.

If you are not feeling well, consider postponing the trip for a better day.

Eating

What and how you eat can help you better manage your COPD.

Try to eat plenty of vegetables, fruits, and protein. These foods will help you fight infections and give you energy.

When you are eating, try to chew slowly and talk less – both steps will help conserve your air.

Eating frequent small meals rather than three large ones may help you feel full longer and will take your body less energy to digest.

If you are overweight, consider trying to lose weight. Even losing a few pounds can help your heart and lungs work better.

If you need to gain weight, try adding foods and drinks to your diet that contain more calories.

Try to drink enough fluids to stay hydrated. Keeping your body well-hydrated keeps your mucous thin – making it easier to get it out of your lungs.

Exercise

Strengthening the muscles of your arms and legs will help you get around easier.

Ask your doctor for advice about the right exercise for you.

Walking is excellent exercise. Try walking around your neighborhood or a local park or inside a shopping mall. Walking for 20 minutes is a good way to start.

When you start any kind of exercise, take it slow. When you feel short of breath, stop and rest.

Try out different exercises until you find one you enjoy. If you enjoy what you're doing, you're more likely to continue doing it.

Ask a friend or family member to join you in your exercise.

Smoking

If you are smoking, stopping can be the best thing you can do to help yourself. It is also the best way to slow down the effects of COPD.

Ask for help from a doctor or nurse. Ask about pills, special gum, or special patches for your skin to help you stop smoking.

Have the number of the local quit assist hotline available. They can help keep you motivated.

Set a date to quit. Tell family and friends you are trying to quit. Ask them to keep cigarettes out of the house. Ask people to smoke away from home or smoke outside.

Try to avoid places and people that may make you want to smoke. Remove ashtrays from your home.

Create a list of activities you can do to distract yourself when you are craving a cigarette.

When you want a cigarette, chew gum or a toothpick. Snack on fruits or vegetables. Drink water.

Think about quitting just one day at a time.

If you start smoking again, figure out why. Knowing this information can help make your next attempt successful. Most people have to stop many times before they are able to stop forever.

When to call the doctor when you have COPD:

Your cough, sputum, or shortness of breath increases

The color of your sputum changes

The sputum is thicker and harder to cough up

You are using your rescue medications more often than usual

You have a fever

You have a reaction to your medication



When to seek emergency care when you have COPD:

It becomes hard for you to talk

It becomes hard for you to walk

Your lips or fingernails turn blue

Your heartbeat is very fast and irregular

Your medicines do not help for long or do not help at all

Your breathing is fast and hard

You become mentally confused



Using Oxygen Safely and Effectively

Obtaining Equipment

The medical equipment supplier will deliver the equipment, teach you how to set it up, check for problems, and clean it.

Keep the supplier's phone number handy in case of problems. Also, get a backup system suitable to use in an emergency.

General Guidelines

If you have a humidifier with your system, check the water level in the humidifier bottle often. If it's near or below the refill line, pour out any remaining water and refill it with sterile or distilled water.

If your nose dries up, apply a water-soluble lubricant, such as K-Y Jelly.

When you need a new supply of oxygen, order it 2 or 3 days in advance or when the register reads one-quarter full.

Maintain the oxygen flow at the prescribed rate.

If you aren't sure whether oxygen is flowing, check the tubing for kinks, blockages, or disconnection. Then make sure the system is on. If you're still unsure, invert the nasal cannula in a glass of water. If bubbles appear, oxygen is flowing through the system. Shake off extra water before reinserting the cannula.



Safety Tips

Oxygen is highly combustible. Call your local fire department to let them know that oxygen is in your house. Keep an all-purpose fire extinguisher within easy reach.

If a fire does start, turn off your oxygen immediately and leave the house.

Don't smoke – and don't let anyone else smoke – near the oxygen system.

Keep the system away from heat and open flames such as a gas stove.

Don't run oxygen tubing under clothing, bed covers, furniture, or carpets.

Keep the oxygen system upright.

Make sure the oxygen is turned off when you are not using it.

Report the following problems to your doctor:

Signs and symptoms of insufficient oxygen, such as difficult, irregular breathing, restlessness, anxiety, tiredness, drowsiness, blue fingernails, blue lips, confusion, or being easily distracted.

Signs and symptoms of excessive oxygen, such as headaches, slurred speech, sleepiness, difficulty waking up, or slow, shallow breathing.

Wait until your doctor or nurse gives you instructions before you change the oxygen flow rate.