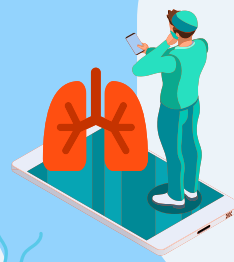


WHAT IS COPD?

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder

What is it?

COPD is an umbrella term for conditions that affect the lungs and impact on the ability to breathe. In COPD, airflow into and out of the lungs is restricted. Breathing feels difficult and because less oxygen is taken in, it can impact upon energy levels. If you are diagnosed with chronic bronchitis or emphysema, you have COPD. It is usually progressive and is not reversible. However, positive changes to lifestyle habits can help you to manage the condition, reduce risk of more serious illness and improve your quality of life.



Bronchitis

In bronchitis, inflammation causes too much mucus to be trapped within the bronchi of the lungs. This traps carbon dioxide in the lungs which can cause cyanosis and consequently heart failure. A persistent cough is common with bronchitis.

Emphysema

In emphysema, the alveoli or air sacs within the lungs become damaged. This causes a shortness of breath and may result more breaths per minute. A range of treatment options are available such as inhalers, and tablets and the treatments are similar for all COPD conditions. Pulmonary rehabilitation or exercise for COPD, is an important component of the treatment plan.



Improve Aerobic and Muscular Fitness

When you are diagnosed with COPD, alongside medicinal treatments, your GP may refer you to a fitness program which will consist of exercises to improve your aerobic and muscular fitness. It may seem counterintuitive and scary to exercise when you are short of breath already. However, increasing your aerobic fitness will, over time, enable you to accomplish more in your day, without getting breathless. Additionally, increasing your muscular fitness will help you to become stronger and this will place less pressure on the bodily systems that enable you to breathe, helping you to breathe better.



Considerations for exercise

The exercise sessions may be 30 minutes in duration. Your exercise professional will guide you to take regular rest breaks which may decrease as your fitness levels improve. You will be guided to work at safe and comfortable levels of intensity. To facilitate this, you will be provided with an intensity scale that ranges from 6-20, called a BORG scale. You will be asked to exercise at levels 11-13 on that scale. The numbers relate to how hard the exercise feels and will ensure that the exercise feels manageable for you. You will be recommended to exercise on 3 to 5 days per week to get the most benefits but all increases in activity are positive.

Assessing Your Current Fitness Levels

Your fitness levels will be assessed prior to starting a program and this will provide invaluable information about where you are now, so that you can see improvements over time and receive a rehabilitation program that is suitable, just for you. The assessments are safe and supervised and will cease if your symptoms increase. The assessments may include some gentle walking, cycling and some muscular activity such as standing from a seated position or gripping an object. The assessment may feel a little uncomfortable but you can stop any time you need to.

Smoking and environmental pollutants are strong risk factors for COPD.

Reduce environmental pollutants by ensuring work and home spaces are well ventilated.

Look up local smoking cessation programs in your area and get help and support for giving up smoking

Attending your program will be crucial to managing your health. There may be instances where you need to be re-checked by your GP. If you experience chest pain, additional wheezing, light headedness or dizziness, be sure to pause your program and see your GP.

References

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