

COPD: Pulmonary Rehabilitation

Many people who have COPD find that participating in a pulmonary rehabilitation program is one of the best decisions they make.

You see, when you try to stay active with COPD, you can quickly become short of breath.

To avoid this uncomfortable feeling, many people stop being active.

Unfortunately, the less activity you do, the more short of breath you become. So you eventually do a little less.

Then you become winded with little activity, and you do even less. This becomes a harmful cycle.

Fortunately, participating in pulmonary rehabilitation can help you break this cycle.

"The purpose of the program is to increase your endurance." - Health Care Practitioner

Pulmonary rehabilitation, or pulmonary rehab for short, can help you use less oxygen when you are active. When you use less oxygen, you can have more energy and do more activities.

"The progress is going to be very very gradual. You are not even going to notice it. Maybe four to six weeks from now one of your family members is going to say, or one of your friends is going to say, you're walking further without being short of breath." – Health Care Practitioner

Pulmonary rehab classes are usually held one or more times a week for several weeks.

During pulmonary rehab, you will participate in a supervised exercise program tailored to what you are able to do.

You will work one-on-one with a member of the pulmonary rehab staff to develop an exercise plan for you.

You will start slowly.

Gradually over weeks, you will build up what you can do. You should see some improvement of your COPD symptoms when you are active and be able to do more activities of daily living.

"Three times a week I went there and three times a week my progress I could see because it's measured. And I could do...I could use heavier weights. So it helps you to feel better about you." – Marilyn, Patient

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In addition to learning exercises, many pulmonary rehab centers have educational classes to help you learn the other parts of COPD management.

They will teach you correct breathing techniques to improve the amount of air you are getting into and out of your body.

Also, you can learn about: your medications, and tips to make sure you remember to take them; oxygen therapy, what it does and when you should use it; nutrition, what foods you should add to your daily routine; and the importance of quitting smoking, if you smoke.

In pulmonary rehab, you can also get emotional and psychological support to help you cope.

You'll benefit from being around others who are in your same situation. You can tell stories, share feelings, and find new friends.

"When you speak of your experiences or how you're feeling on a day, they truly understand because they have experienced it. Maybe someone suggest something that you hadn't thought about doing and you go, "Oh, well, let me try that." And then you go back and, "Yeah, I tried that and it worked." So just being with a group of people just like you." – Marilyn, Patient

The goal of pulmonary rehab is to give you the skills you need to continue to exercise when you leave pulmonary rehab.

Take advantage of this opportunity to help yourself be as active as possible.