



# ASK THE BREATHWORKS COACH

## What is pulmonary (respiratory) rehabilitation?

Just as a money management class might help you get more out of your money by showing you how to budget and invest more effectively, a pulmonary rehabilitation program can teach you skills to manage your COPD more effectively so you can live life to its fullest. A pulmonary rehabilitation program can help someone with COPD become fitter and more physically active, and learn new ways of reducing breathlessness. In short, pulmonary rehabilitation can help you take more control over your COPD so it has less control over you.

But the benefits aren't just physical – becoming more physically active can increase your energy level, improve your mood, and help you maintain or regain your independence. Having better understanding and control of your COPD can also boost your confidence, and help keep you out of hospital when flare-ups occur.

So what are pulmonary rehabilitation programs designed to do?

- Increase your capacity for exercise
- Reduce your breathlessness and fatigue
- Increase your ability to do everyday tasks
- Improve your inhaler technique
- Provide emotional and social support

have to do some digging on your own. To find out what's available in your area, call The Lung Association, or your local hospital.

### **Are all pulmonary rehabilitation programs the same?**

While most pulmonary rehabilitation programs share common goals, and usually include some combination of education and exercise, programs do differ from place to place.

## Q&A on Pulmonary Rehab Programs

### **How do I find out whether I can participate in a pulmonary rehabilitation program?**

Ask your doctor whether a pulmonary rehabilitation program is right for you. Most people with COPD can benefit from some type of pulmonary rehabilitation – the trick is finding a program. Your doctor may not be aware of all of the resources in your community, so you may





Some programs offer an ongoing support program or group that will provide you with a network of understanding, and supportive people (and sometimes, even exercise equipment!) long after you finish the initial course.

Comprehensive pulmonary rehabilitation programs may be especially helpful for people who:

- are very inactive
- are afraid of physical activity
- eat a poor-quality diet
- struggle with breathlessness
- have difficulty controlling their breathing

**There are three main kinds of pulmonary rehabilitation programs.**

### **1. Formal, large-scale programs**

You need a doctor's referral to get into these kinds of programs, which take a broad approach to improving your health. Offered in larger centres, and typically based in hospitals (most programs don't require you to stay in hospital, though some do), comprehensive programs bring together a health care team, including respiratory therapists, physiotherapists, pharmacists, dietitians, social workers, and psychologists as well as doctors and nurses.

Before you begin a comprehensive program, one of the doctors will review your history, and examine you to make sure pulmonary rehabilitation is right for you. An exercise program will be made to fit your individual needs, and you can follow it at your own pace.

Comprehensive rehabilitation programs include training and counseling in the following areas:

- smoking cessation
- improving physical fitness
- breathing control
- energy conservation
- preventing flare-ups
- medication management
- nutrition
- learning to live with a chronic condition

**A rehabilitation program can help you stay healthy!**



## 2. Community-based rehabilitation programs

Not all communities offer formal, full-scale pulmonary rehabilitation programs. But that doesn't mean you can't reap the benefits of exercise, which is one of the most powerful tools for managing COPD (second only to quitting smoking, in fact). Community courses or programs (many of which are offered by The Lung Association) provide one or more of the essential elements of pulmonary rehabilitation. The possibilities include programs like maintenance programs, informal groups linked with local hospitals, nutrition classes offered by community centres, and exercise maintenance programs.

## 3. Self-directed, at-home rehabilitation programs

Maybe you're not a 'joiner'. Or you live in a town where no formal pulmonary rehabilitation programs are available. You can still improve your fitness level, and learn techniques to reduce breathlessness and fatigue: Many people with COPD develop their own self-directed rehab programs. For example, you can walk or climb stairs, gradually going a little farther each time, and practice breathing exercises every day. The key is sticking with it.

You can get help developing an at-home program. Speak to your doctor about possible exercises and activities. Read 'Canada's Food Guide' to learn how to choose healthier foods. Most importantly, learn proper breathing control so you can get maximum benefit from any rehabilitation program you choose. To learn more about breathing control techniques, check out The Lung Association factsheet:

### **Breathlessness**



## More Resources for Pulmonary Rehabilitation

### The Lung Association website

Visit our website, [www.lung.ca](http://www.lung.ca), and look for the COPD link under the Lung Diseases section. Once you're in the COPD section, you can find pulmonary rehabilitation information in the section titled "Get Help for COPD".

### Other Factsheets

This factsheet is one of many that are available free through The Lung Association's Breathworks program. You can pick up more at your local Lung Association office. Or, you can ask to have copies mailed to you simply by calling us.



### BreathWorks / The Lung Association

If you would like advice or information on any other topic related to COPD, including details about exercise, nutrition, and coping skills, call The Lung Association at 1-866-717-COPD (2673) or your local hospital.

***Remember,  
you can do it!***



*All images, except 'coach', used with permission from  
**Living Well with COPD™** - A plan of action for life  
self-management education program.*

---

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](http://www.lung.ca/breathworks)** .

---

B R E A T H W  R K S <sup>TM</sup>