



Breathe Easy: Maintaining Healthy Lungs

The days were getting shorter but the cooler temperatures had not yet brought snow. Carol hurried home from work and wondered how many more days she would be able to get out on her bike before the weather forced her to switch to her gym routine for the winter months. She quickly changed clothes and put on her helmet before pulling her bike out of the garage. Her ride started out leisurely but as soon as she reached the bike trail along the river, she took off! Carol breathed deeply and felt the cool air fill her lungs.

We often take our lungs for granted but they do important work to keep us alive. While our bodies have natural defense systems to support lung health, there are things we can do to protect and strengthen our lungs.

Protecting Your Lungs

Avoid Indoor Pollutants

Lung health can be negatively affected by secondhand smoke and chemicals that can be found in the home or workplace. It is a good idea to test your home for radon, an invisible, tasteless, and odorless gas that is emitted from the ground. When there is not sufficient ventilation, the gas can accumulate and pose a health risk.

Outdoor Air Quality

It is helpful to monitor the air quality in your area. This information can usually be found wherever you get your weather forecast.

Prevent Infections

We have all gained a lot of experience preventing infections during the COVID-19 pandemic and many of these strategies can help protect your lung health. Wash your hands and stay home when you're sick. During flu season, wear a mask to protect yourself and those around you.

Another key tool to protecting lung health are vaccinations. Stay up to date with your COVID boosters and get your flu shot to prevent respiratory illnesses that can have a lasting impact on lung function.

Go to the Dentist

Ensuring you have a healthy mouth can be an important step to preventing infections that could affect the lungs. Be sure to brush your teeth twice a day and visit the dentist on a regular basis.

Take a Deep Breath

Most people take shallow breaths from the chest area, which means they are using only a small portion of the lungs. Making a point of taking deeper breaths—even for just 2 – 5 minutes a day—helps improve vital lung capacity, or the amount of air that can be exhaled. This is important for lung health but it can also help decrease the physical manifestations of stress.

Make a plan to Quit Smoking

This is a message we get all the time and it can cause stress for smokers who are not yet ready to quit. If you are a smoker and you want to quit there are many resources to help you do so, such as:

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More questions?

Want to speak to a care expert about how to ensure the safety of your loved one during these uncertain times?

Let's connect you with the closest available Qualicare expert in your city to answer your questions.

- The Association for the Treatment of Tobacco Use and Dependence
- Smokefree.gov
- 1-800-Quit-Now

Until you are ready to commit to quitting, it is beneficial to reduce the amount you smoke.

Exercise and Lung Health

We do not often think of our exercise routine's role in improving or maintaining lung health. However, in addition to increasing your strength and cardiovascular health, exercise forces your lungs to work harder because they need to deliver more oxygen to your muscles. In the same process, they are expelling additional carbon dioxide.

Exercising to ensure you have healthy lungs helps prevent disease and slow the natural aging of the organ. If you do develop lung disease, exercise can contribute to slowing the progression of the illness and allowing you to maintain an active lifestyle for longer.

Lung Health After Smoking

Lungs are self-cleaning and, to some degree, have the ability to repair themselves. Once someone quits smoking, the lungs begin to heal. The speed of recovery depends on how much and how long a person smoked.

Within months, or even weeks, lung function will begin to improve and lungs become better at self-cleaning to reduce the risk of infection. To help lungs heal, it is important to follow the above recommendations. In addition to these, it can be helpful to drink warm fluids as these help thin mucus making it easier to clear from the airways.

After an hour on the bike trail, Carol heads home. She has always enjoyed biking but she can remember what it was like when she used to smoke—she couldn't ride as long or fast. She had thought it was because she was getting older, but a decade later—and no longer a smoker—Carol loves riding her bike more than ever and is amazed at how great it feels to take a full, deep breath.

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