



Taking Control of Chronic Lung Disease



Having chronic lung disease--whether it's COPD, emphysema, or asthma--can feel like a constant battle...especially when it is on top of other chronic health conditions. If this somewhat describes the way you feel, be encouraged. This guide will equip you with the knowledge and tools you need to keep the symptoms of your lung condition under control. By learning how to become active self-managers of your condition, you can start taking control of your chronic lung disease...and start taking back your life.

Becoming Active Self-Managers

Having chronic lung disease changes a person's life and forces one to adjust to a new way of living. For example, you may have been active all of your life, but now you just can't do the things you once enjoyed in the way you used to.

So what does it mean to actively self-manage your lung disease? It means learning more about your condition and then making the decision to take control of it by living a healthy lifestyle. This includes diet and exercise, avoiding triggers and infections, taking medications properly, and learning techniques for better breathing and lung clearing. Even if this seems like a difficult change, because you now have been equipped with the Action Planning technique, all of these goals are now within your reach.

Aside from being on the proper medications, **avoiding lung triggers and irritants is the single most effective way to control your lung symptoms** and therefore is a good place to start. On your right is a list of the most common lung irritants—take a look to see if there are any exposures in your life that you can start making an effort to limit or avoid.

Common Triggers & Irritants

- **Tobacco smoke:** Smoking (and secondhand smoke) dries your airways, constricting them while also causing inflammation. By cutting down or quitting, you will not only breathe better, but research shows that you will likely also benefit more from your EECOP treatments.
- **Cold weather:** Cold air constricts your airways and can cause them to spasm. On cold days, use a scarf, handkerchief, or a cold-weather mask to breathe through.
- **Allergens:**
 - **Pollen & molds:** Keep windows closed during high-pollen months.
 - **Dust mites:** Vacuum your mattress and wrap them in an airtight cover to prevent dust mites from hiding within the fibers. Wash all bedding weekly in hot water.
 - **Indoor allergens:** Change heating and air conditioning filters monthly.
 - **Smog:** Avoid going outdoors on Air Quality Advisory days.
- **Emotional stress:** Negative emotions can cause your airways to narrow and make your symptoms worse. Make an effort to incorporate the stress management and relaxation techniques you've learned into your daily life.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing, or “**Abdominal Breathing**,” is an easy and effective technique that, when used properly, can benefit you in many ways.

The shortness of breath that you experience when you have chronic lung disease is a result of the large amount of old air that gets trapped inside your lungs. Your *diaphragm* (the main muscle used in breathing) has become weakened over time and has a hard time pushing the air out with regular breaths. **Diaphragmatic breathing is a technique that strengthens your diaphragm and forces your lungs to squeeze out that old, stale air.**

Benefits of Diaphragmatic Breathing

- More oxygen gets into your lungs and organs
- It causes you to feel relaxed and refreshed
- It strengthens your diaphragm and helps you breathe more easily over time
- It allows your body to use less effort and energy to breathe

Instructions for Diaphragmatic Breathing

1. **Sit up in a chair or lie on your back** (If you are lying down you can use a pillow under your knees to support your legs).
2. **Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage.** This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.
3. **Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand.** The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. **Tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through pursed lips.** The hand on your upper chest must remain as still as possible.

Staying Hydrated

- One way to help your lungs clear out the thick mucous that may be plugging the airways is to stay properly hydrated.
- Drink 6 glasses of water a day to help thin out and loosen the mucous. (**If your doctor has advised you to watch your fluid intake, **do not** drink more than advised.)

Controlled Coughing

This deep coughing technique can also help clear out the mucous in your airways, making it easier to breathe.

1. **Sit on the edge of a chair** or bed with your feet flat on the floor.
2. Hold something (such as a pillow) firmly against your abdomen.
3. **Take a few slow deep breaths**, inhaling through your nose and slowly exhaling through your lips, bending slightly forward and pressing the pillow into your belly.
4. **On the 5th breath, make 2-3 strong coughs** in a row (without taking a breath in between).
5. Repeat this 3 times.

Tips for Exercising

- ❖ **Use your inhaler** (if you have one) before you start exercising. This will allow you to exercise longer with less shortness of breath.
- ❖ **Breathe.** Spend time warming up and cooling down by doing some deep breathing exercises
- ❖ **Be aware that arm exercises can cause you to tire out** or feel short of breath sooner than leg exercises.
- ❖ **Cold, dry air makes breathing and exercise more difficult.** If this is constantly an issue, consider a water-based activity such as water aerobics.
- ❖ **Do not rush.** Sometimes people with lung problems will try to get somewhere quickly before their “breath runs out.” Instead of doing this, move slowly, being conscious to **take breaths as you go.**