

Wellness-Fitness

FEDERAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Tips for Living with COPD

COPD can be challenging, but it doesn't have to get in the way of living a full life. A few adjustments can make all the difference.

Many of us have experienced difficulty breathing when we've had an extreme cold and our sinuses or air passages were obstructed with mucus. For those people living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) this can be an everyday experience.

COPD is used to describe ongoing lower respiratory problems that are characterized by:

- Emphysema – damage to the air sacs in the lung
- Bronchitis – irritation and inflammation of the bronchial tubes, the branch-like structures that carry air in and out of the lungs
- Overproduction of mucus, which interferes with the normal lung functions (mucus builds up in the bronchial tubes and the air sacs)

Some of the symptoms of COPD include:

- Chronic coughing, especially "smoker's cough"
- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Tightness in the chest

These are just some of the more common symptoms of COPD. They may also indicate some other medical issue. Check in with your health care provider if you have a cough that just won't go away, if you feel like a cold or flu has lasted too long (over a week and a half), or if your symptoms are getting progressively worse.

Breathing techniques

Because of the change in breathing capacity that COPD can cause, it's important to learn new ways of breathing. Practicing these new techniques can not only improve the amount of oxygen that you're taking in, they can help you feel more at ease about your breathing in general.

- Pursed-lip breathing – breathing in through the nostrils and breathing out through pursed lips, like you're blowing out a candle.
- Extra-long exhales – exhale completely to clear the stale air out of your lungs and allow the new air to come in more easily. You can try to breathe out for twice as long as you breathe in.

Better Breathers Club

Make new friends and get breathing tips at a Better Breathers Club in your area. You can find out more information on the American Lung Association's site (www.lung.org/lung-disease/copd/connect-with-others/better-breathers-clubs/).

Physical Activity

Take it slow and gentle and avoid physical activities that make you feel completely out of breath. You'll slowly build up your ability to breathe easily as you take a walk, dance, or lift light weights.

Taking Special Care

- Working closely with your primary physician to manage the disease
- Getting a yearly flu shot
- Getting a pneumonia vaccine
- Participating in pulmonary rehabilitation. □



Staying on Balance

It's easy to take your sense of balance for granted—that is, until something goes wrong with it.

As people get older, that sense of balance can become impaired, leaving them more prone to falls and related injuries. But there are exercises and activities that can help us stay strong and balanced at any age.

One of the tricky aspects of this topic is that balance is actually several different abilities working together:

Inner ear: the vestibular system—in the inner ear—tells the brain which way is up and whether the head is moving.

Brain and nervous system: the proprioceptive system—our “muscle sense”—tries to determine the position of the body in space and the motion needed to accomplish a given task.

Eyes: vision adds essential information about where we are in relation to our surroundings.

Of course, beyond these systems, our muscles must be strong and agile to keep us in the right positions. As with so many other aspects of fitness, the key to good balance is staying active on a regular basis.

“Physical inactivity, such as sitting all day, can lead to deterioration of muscles, bones and balance,” says Michelle Gabela, a personal trainer and a health coach at

Federal Occupational Health (FOH). Gabela emphasizes that core stability and core strength are essential, adding: “Make sure that your core is strong enough to support your body.” Core muscles are those in the center of the body—the abdominals, the low and mid back, and the muscles that stabilize the hips.

A core-strengthening exercise demonstration can be viewed online at: www.FOH.dhhs.gov/whatwedo/tenminworkout.html.

Gabela points out that even if you work at a desk job, there are exercises - such as the “sitting leg lift” -that you can do while sitting at your desk or in an office without any special equipment. You can also try the ten-minute workout in the last issue of FOH's Wellness-Fitness: www.FOH.dhhs.gov/whatwedo/wellness/wfnewsletters/Issue3_2012.pdf.

But you don't need a special routine to improve your balance. Many types of exercise can have similar payoffs—including Pilates, yoga, most kinds of dance, and games that require you to stand up and move your whole body. A number of studies have found that tai chi, an ancient Chinese form of exercise that requires you to gently shift your body weight, is especially useful in improving balance. □



And the Winning Recipes Are...

The response from our Healthy Recipes Contest on the FOH Web site earlier this year was quite gratifying, with 24 tasty recipes submitted — ranging from mango salsa to vegetarian paella to enginar — a traditional Turkish artichoke dish.

There were five categories — Breakfasts and Desserts, Seafood/Poultry Entrees, Vegetarian Entrees, Salads, and Side Dishes. We asked all you food-lovers to vote for your favorites in each category. We also asked a certified nutritionist to comment on each recipe's nutritional merits. You can download any of the recipes entered in the contest by going to FOH.hhs.gov/calendar/recipecontest.html and clicking on the recipe name.

Ladies and gentlemen, the top two overall vote-getters (with 77 votes each) were...

Portabella Mushroom Pizza

From Sandra Bearden, SAMHSA, Rockville, MD

Preparation/Cook Time: 60 minutes

Number of Servings: 2

Ingredients: Chopped vegetables (suggestion: onion, broccoli, carrots, spinach, sun-dried tomatoes, artichoke hearts; optional: chopped chicken, beef or sausage)

4 portabella mushrooms
Pasta sauce

Parmesan cheese
Mozzarella cheese
Olive oil
Salt, pepper and garlic powder (to taste)

Break off the stems from the mushroom caps and wash the caps thoroughly. Place 4 large mushrooms into a baking dish. Pour 2 tablespoons of olive oil over the mushrooms. Bake for 30 minutes.

Pour the water off the mushrooms after they are baked. Top with the pasta sauce and desired toppings. Sprinkle with parmesan and mozzarella cheese. Bake for an additional 10-15 minutes until cheese is melted.

Blueberry Banana Protein Pancake

From Patricia Hamann, NARA, College Park, MD

Preparation/Cook Time: 30 minutes

Number of Servings: 2

Ingredients:
1/2 cup quick oats
1/2 cup fat free cottage cheese
1/2 cup egg beaters or just egg whites
1/2 banana

1/2 cup blueberries
1 tsp vanilla

Put all the ingredients except the blueberries in a blender. Blend till smooth. Add the blueberries and pulse a couple of times. Spray skillet or griddle with Pam. Put 1/4 cup of mix in hot skillet or griddle. This will make six nice-sized pancakes. If you're on weight watchers, it is only one point per pancake and the pancakes are considered power food.

You can also change the flavor by omitting the banana and blueberries and adding 1/2 an apple and cinnamon; or just take out the blueberries and have banana pancakes.

Winners in other categories included:

Poultry/Seafood: Blushing Baked Salmon from Lizabeth Fisher, NCHS, Hyattsville, MD

Salad: Roasted Beet Salad from Maureen Stevens, FOH, Denver, CO

Side Dishes: Parmesan Broccoli from Kayla Adams, OPM, Boyers, PA □



Lightening the Load: Caring for the Caregiver

The journey of life often has twists and turns. One day a loved one is doing well and taking care of his or her daily needs; days later, that same person needs full-time care because of an accident or medical complications.

Being the caregiver in such situations can be an all-consuming occupation. It's difficult to imagine how overwhelmed a caregiver can become—being “on call” for so many hours a day, for example. Even with all the demands, caregivers can be reluctant to reach out for help. So if you know someone who's a caregiver, don't be afraid to offer some assistance to lighten the load. And don't just tell them to “let me know if I can do anything;” Look for ways to help them.

The important thing is to be there for the caregiver in whatever way you can. Even small things can help.

- Find someone to cover the caregiver's duties and then take the caregiver out for some time away. Even if it's just a meal, a short walk, or a cup of coffee outside the home, that break can really make a difference.
- Visit and help with light housework or other tasks that make the caregiver's job easier.
- Offer to drive the person being cared for to one of his or her appointments, including doctor appointments, day care programs, etc.
- Ask the caregiver if he or she would like you to research programs and support groups that could be useful to them.

Big things can help, too, of course.

- Propose to take a day or night of the week to cover the caregiver duties, if you're able.

- Offer to hire a professional housecleaner to relieve the caregiver of some of the burdens of housekeeping.

- Offer to have a professional caregiver come in from time to time to relieve the primary caregiver.

Time away can be used by the caregiver for self care:

- Getting some physical activity
- Going to a support group
- Seeing a counselor
- Going to religious services or meeting with a spiritual community
- Visiting the doctor or dentist for a checkup
- Getting a facial, massage, or other spa treatment

By being there for a caregiver and providing even a little time away, you can make a world of difference. This respite from regular duties can allow him or her to recharge and renew. This can help the caregiver to return

to his or her duties refreshed, relaxed, and better equipped to focus on their loved one. □

