

Fit for Life

Keeping up with pulmonary rehabilitation exercises at home

Fitness buffs will tell you their workouts don't end after they leave the gym. Staying in shape means making changes at home too. The same goes for pulmonary rehabilitation. A home exercise routine can help to maintain your lung function and improve your overall well-being.

Think of your pulmonologist, respiratory therapist, and primary care physician like a team of personal trainers. A pulmonary rehabilitation program is a great place to learn how to do the proper exercises with a health care professional's guidance and expertise. They'll create an at-home exercise plan and suggest lifestyle changes to reach your long-term goals after your formal pulmonary rehab sessions end.

Talk with your pulmonary rehab team about your living situation and surroundings. Perhaps you already have a treadmill, stationary bike, or light free weights to use at home. If you don't, they can suggest resources in your area such as a community or senior center that has exercise equipment.

They also can recommend simple strategies to fit in the recommended 20 minutes of continuous walking a day. You could do laps at a local mall or high school track, stroll around your block or apartment building, or even just walk the length of your hallway a few more times.

While aerobic exercise focuses on your cardiovascular endurance, strength training keeps your upper body in shape. Some people like to use light free weights or resistance bands; others use items from their pantry like soup cans or water bottles. Your pulmonary rehab team will advise you on the ideal amount of weight, type of exercise, and number of repetitions to improve your strength and muscle tone.

When you leave a formal pulmonary rehab program, you may miss the social support and motivation that it offered. Signing up for a gym membership, finding a workout buddy, or making an arrangement with a family member can increase the chances that you'll stick with the routine.

Safety first

While a regular exercise routine is important, be careful not to overdo it. Your pulmonary rehab team will identify stretching and warm-up



exercises that start at a low intensity and then gradually increase your heart and breathing rates. At the end of your exercise routine, it's also important to slow your pace for five minutes to cool down.

Watch for signs of a possible exacerbation. The providers at your pulmonary rehab program can help you become familiar with your breathing levels and what to do if you experience shortness of breath.

If you use long-term supplemental oxygen, your pulmonary rehab team will determine which oxygen flow rates you should use during periods of rest and exercise. They may recommend that you use a fingertip pulse oximeter at home to occasionally assess your oxygen level.

Finally, listen to your instincts. If something doesn't feel right, stop doing it immediately, and call your primary health care provider. You may need to limit your activities until the problem is resolved.

Regular exercise has many benefits. The stronger the muscles you use for breathing become, the more efficiently your body will use oxygen. Staying fit also can help lower blood pressure, lose weight, and manage stress. Keep up the progress you made in pulmonary rehab by following an exercise routine that is convenient and enjoyable. ■

Information provided by Peter J. Rising, MS, manager of the pulmonary function laboratory at Temple University Health System in Philadelphia.

TOM WHALEN

EDITOR'S NOTE: Your doctor or therapist has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about an issue related to your health. It is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your doctor or therapist.
