



## Keeping Your Breathing Problems in Check

Patients with chronic breathing problems often become frustrated with the limitations their condition places on their lives. Symptoms such as cough and shortness of breath prevent some activities that were once enjoyed. Frequent visits to the hospital or the emergency room become burdensome physically, financially, and emotionally.



If you have breathing problems you may unintentionally contribute to your problems by not doing all that you can for yourself. You must cooperate with your doctor by closely following the treatment plan designed for you. There are many things you can do to keep your condition in better control:

- **Take Your Medications** – One of the most important things you can do is take all of your medications exactly as ordered. Many medications will not work as effectively if not taken as directed. For example, inhaled medications such as ipratropium (aka, Atrovent®) and albuterol (aka, Proventil®) are only effective for about 4-6 hours. Failure to use them as ordered by your doctor may result in periods where your breathing is unstable. Some medications, such as inhaled steroids, must be taken regularly to obtain full benefit. In fact, using inhaled steroids “as needed” can actually worsen your breathing. When antibiotics are ordered, it is very important to take them until they are all gone. Failure to do so can result in the infection returning and may encourage the infection to become resistant to medication. If you are not satisfied with one or more of your medications, don’t just stop taking it. If it is one of the medications you use with your nebulizer (e.g., albuterol or ipratropium), call us and we will contact your doctor. For other medications, talk with your doctor about the problems you are having. See if a solution can be reached by switching to another medication or by changing the dosage. If you stop taking some medications suddenly it can be dangerous.
- **Use Your Oxygen** – In COPD patients with a low oxygen level, oxygen therapy is the only treatment that has been shown to extend survival (i.e., how long you live). To receive the full benefit, it is important to wear the oxygen exactly as ordered by your doctor. It is especially important to wear the oxygen during sleep and activity, when oxygen levels are typically at their lowest levels. If your oxygen level is low all the time, oxygen should be worn 24 hours per day.

- **Regular Doctor Visits** – Keep all appointments with your doctor. These regular visits allow the doctor to monitor your condition and observe for changes that may indicate the need for alterations to your care. If there is a change in your condition – such as increased shortness of breath, change in cough or sputum production, increased weakness, or other new symptoms – contact your doctor as soon as possible. Waiting 2-3 days may be the difference between taking an antibiotic at home and ending up in the hospital with pneumonia.
- **Vaccinations** – Yearly flu shots help to prevent most forms of the influenza virus. Patients with chronic illnesses like COPD are often more susceptible to the virus due to a weakened immune system. The pneumovax or “pneumonia shot” helps to prevent the more common types of bacterial pneumonia. Once thought to be good for a lifetime, it is now recommended that the shot be repeated every 5–7 years.



- **Avoid Infections** – During cold and flu season, avoid large gatherings or those with cold and flu symptoms. Many hospitalizations start with a well-meaning relative stopping by with the grandkids, who may happen to have “colds” at the time. Although not that serious for the grandkids, that cold can land you in the hospital. Place a friendly sign on your door to remind them. We have such a sign available upon request.
- **Stay Active** – Regular activity keeps your entire body in better physical condition. A regular exercise program, approved by your doctor, can help your body to use oxygen more effectively, decrease shortness of breath, and even increase your resistance to infection. Patients who become inactive and “retire to the recliner” are often more depressed, and recent evidence suggests they don’t live as long.
- **Eat, Drink, and Rest** – Proper nutrition, fluid intake, and sleep play an important role in your overall wellness and ability to resist infection. Maintain your weight near what is ideal for your height.
- **Education** – Continue to learn more about your condition and how you can be more involved in managing it. Educated patients are able to make better decisions and are more compliant with treatment.

Our hope is that all of these tips will assist you in your effort to ***Breathe Easy.***