
Breathe Easy is dedicated to providing helpful information to those with breathing difficulties

Take Control of Your Breathing Problems

Individuals 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, the best way to minimize these frustrations is by doing everything 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 symptoms under better control.

●**Take Your Medications** One of the most important things you can do is take all of your medications exactly as prescribed by your doctor. Many medications will not work as effectively if not taken as directed. For example, inhaled medications such as ipratropium and albuterol (taken separately or together as DuoNeb) are only effective for about 4-6 hours. Going longer between treatments may result in periods where breathing is more difficult and symptoms flare up. Mucus may be retained in your airway which makes you more prone to infections that can land you in the hospital.

Other medications, such as inhaled steroids (e.g., budesonide), must be taken regularly to obtain full benefit. When taken regularly, they've been



shown to improve breathing and reduce your risk of hospitalization. Using inhaled steroids such as budesonide "as needed" may not help at all and 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, ipratropium, budesonide), 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** If you have Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) with a low oxygen level, oxygen therapy is the only treatment that has been shown to extend your life expectancy. 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. Individuals with chronic illnesses like COPD are more susceptible to the virus due to a weakened immune system and an annual flu shot is recommended. The Pneumovax or “pneumonia shot” helps to prevent some types of bacterial pneumonia. Once thought to be good for a lifetime, it is now recommended that the vaccination be repeated every 5–7 years. Talk with your doctor about whether these vaccinations are right for you.

●**Avoid Infections** During cold and flu season, avoid large gatherings and individuals with cold and flu symptoms. Many hospitalizations start with a well-meaning relative stopping by with a child who may happen to have a “cold” at the time. Although not that serious for the child, a cold can result in hospitalization for you. Place a friendly sign on your door to remind them. We have a sign that you can download on our web site at www.rotech.com/respiratory/v2/be_pdfs/Compliance.pdf.

●**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. Individuals 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 and build.

●**Education** Continue to learn more about your condition and how you can be more involved in managing it. Being educated allows you to better make informed decisions and helps you understand the benefit of being compliant with your treatment. Visit our Web site at www.rotech.com and click “Respiratory.” There you will find a wealth of information designed to help you. Our hope is that all of these tips will assist you in your effort to **Breathe Easy**.

Breathe Easy Tip of the Month

Did you know that using your nebulizer medication as ordered can actually improve your sleep? This quote from the medical journal **Chest** tells us those patients that used their ipratropium four times each day had improved sleep quality and fewer drops in oxygen level during sleep.

“Nebulized ipratropium given [four times per day] in patients with well defined moderate-to-severe COPD resulted in significant improvement in [nighttime blood oxygen level] as measured during sleep and significant improvements in the perception of sleep quality.”

Dr Richard J Martin, Chest

The study also found a trend toward fewer awakenings per hour of sleep when using ipratropium as ordered. To get a better night’s sleep, don’t forget to use your medications as ordered.