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

Conserve Energy For The Things You Enjoy

A common challenge for people with breathing difficulties is a lack of energy to perform the activities they enjoy. Lack of energy in COPD can stem from several causes. In some patients with breathing problems, the work of breathing is much higher due to obstructed airways. The energy required to breathe may take five times more energy than normal, leaving less energy available for other activity.

Secondly, it is common for patients with breathing problems to have poorly conditioned muscles due to reduced activity. Muscles that are out of

shape do not utilize energy as effectively as muscles that are well conditioned.

Another issue is poor sleep in patients with breathing problems. Due to shallow breathing and drops in oxygen during sleep, the person is prevented from getting good quality sleep which also impairs their energy level during the day.

How can people facing these challenges conserve energy for the activities they enjoy, rather than using this energy to perform everyday chores? Follow the 'Six P's' for more energy.

The 'Six P's' for More Energy

Living Well With COPD™, a self-management program for people with COPD recommends the following:

Prioritize- Make a list of the activities you *have to do* (e.g., bathe, cook, clean, etc.) and those you *like to do* (e.g., garden, visit friends, etc.). Eliminate tasks that are not necessary or enjoyable.

Plan- Schedule your activities so that they are broken up throughout the week. Don't try to do too much at any one time. Schedule those tasks that require the most energy for the time of day when you have more energy.

Pace Yourself- People with breathing problems often try to rush through difficult tasks to get



them over with, leaving themselves very short of breath. It is better to perform the task at a slower pace. If you start to become more short of breath, take a short break and catch your breath. Break large tasks into several smaller parts, taking breaks as needed.

Try not to talk during activity. Talking takes energy and may cause your breathing patterns to be less efficient. Try to alternate heavy tasks with lighter ones. Finally, do your best to get a good night's sleep.

Positioning- Most people with breathing problems find that working overhead or bending over makes them short of breath. Try to position frequently used items in a place that prevents bending or reaching. When possible, perform a task at waist to chest level supporting your elbows or forearms while you work. Keep a high stool handy in your work areas to allow you to sit down to perform tasks (e.g., washing dishes).

Often, people with challenged breathing use their **accessory muscles** (i.e., muscles in the upper chest and rib cage) to assist their diaphragm with breathing. Using a **tri-pod position** (i.e., leaning forward with arms extended with hands or elbows resting on a surface), can help to stabilize the shoulders and more effectively use the accessory muscles to assist breathing. Examples of employing this technique are leaning over on the shopping cart while walking in a store or leaning over on a table while sitting.

Pursed-Lip Breathing- This is a breathing technique that allows for better emptying of stale air from the lungs, more oxygen into your blood, and is also relaxing. It is performed by inhaling through the nose, then exhale slowly through pursed lips (as if whistling). Exhaling should take about twice as long as inhaling (i.e., count 1, 2 while inhaling and 1, 2, 3, 4 for exhaling). Relax while performing and don't force a deeper than normal inhalation or exhalation.

When performing an activity that makes you short of breath, use the pursed lip breathing. Try performing the work while exhaling. For example, when climbing stairs, inhale while resting on a stair. Then as you exhale through pursed lips, climb one or two stairs. Repeat this, pacing yourself up the stairs.

Positive Attitude- Many patients with severe breathing difficulties never give up. Rather than focusing on what they **can't** do, they center on what they **can** do and maintain a high quality of life. These patients commonly stay more active than many people without breathing challenges. They are very creative in finding ways to adapt their activities so that they can continue to perform them.

For example, a dear friend of mine loved to feed the birds but it was difficult for her to walk out and fill the feeders, especially in cold winter air. She had a feeder installed on her window sill where she could simply lift the window from inside and refill it without leaving her kitchen.

Many people choose to adapt their golf carts, lawn mowers, four-wheelers, power wheelchairs, and scooters to carry their portable oxygen system or items needed for a specific task. This gives them the mobility to travel a longer distance on the motorized vehicle. When they reach their destination they have more energy for their desired activities, including fishing, hunting, gardening, going to the coffee shop, or just visiting neighbors. Their tenacity and refusal to give in and just sit in a chair to watch TV sets an example and can be an inspiration to others around them.

Remember that using the **Six P's** will give you enough energy to do the things you enjoy while still allowing you to **Breathe Easy**.