



## BTS/ACPRC Guideline

### Physiotherapy management of the adult, medical, spontaneously breathing patient

#### Web Appendix 3 - Respiratory (chest) physiotherapy for people with COPD

www.brit-thoracic.org.uk

#### How can physiotherapy help me?

Physiotherapists can give you advice and information on many aspects of your condition. There are several techniques and strategies that a physiotherapist can help you learn so that you can cope better with your shortness of breath. They can advise ways to make certain difficult tasks a little easier. They can help you get fitter and stronger so you can remain as independent as possible. All these will help you get the most out of life and allow you to carry on doing things you want to be able to do.

#### Managing breathlessness

Being short of breath can be very frightening and it can be difficult to know what to do. You may also find that breathlessness limits you doing some things that you want to do. There are several physiotherapy techniques for helping you cope with breathlessness, such as breathing exercises, positioning and energy conservation.

*Breathing exercises* will help you to control your breathing when you are active and getting breathless. They will also help you manage if you get short of breath suddenly. Breathing exercises are useful techniques that you can learn to do on your own, at any time.

#### *Positions to relieve breathlessness.*

There are some positions that you can sit, stand or lie in that can help to make your breathing easier. The best positions are those which need the least energy or effort. If you tense your shoulders and grip onto things when you are breathless, you're using more energy and will need to breathe harder. Learning the right positions will help you to save your energy.

*Energy conservation* means learning to do activities in a different way, so that you are able to control your breathing more easily while you are doing them and they use less energy. This is best taught by an occupational therapist, so do ask to see one.

#### Activity and Exercise

One of the most important aspects of looking after yourself when you have COPD is to keep as active as you can. This will help you to stay fitter for longer. A physiotherapist can advise you about maintaining an active lifestyle and taking some sort of physical exercise that is right for you. Exercise will also

make you less breathless in the long run. Your physiotherapist will explain how.

#### *Pulmonary rehabilitation*

All people with COPD can benefit from taking part in pulmonary rehabilitation. This is a programme of exercise and education that has big benefits to you by helping you manage your condition and help you get fitter so you can do more. There are separate information leaflets available on this treatment. Ask your doctor to refer you if you have not been through a programme.

#### *Walking*

A physiotherapist will advise you on how much and how fast to walk. He or she will also be able to assess you for a walking aid, should you need one. Using a walking aid can help you walk more easily, especially if you are very breathless when walking or need to carry oxygen. A frame with wheels at both the front and the back is best (a rollator frame).

#### *After you have had an infection or sudden worsening (an exacerbation)*

Whether you were admitted to hospital or treated at home it is very important to get moving again as soon as you can after an exacerbation. Long periods in bed and being inactive are bad for your chest. Keep moving around during an infection if you possibly can. You may need a rollator frame to help you. If you are in hospital and are very breathless, ask for one that has arm rests as well – a gutter rollator frame. Your physiotherapist should be able to get you one for use while you are in hospital.

Try to keep active- it will be good for you in the long term.

#### Keeping your chest 'clear'

A physiotherapist can advise you on the best way to clear sputum (phlegm) from your chest. This is very important, as leaving the sputum there increases your problems; it can easily become infected and make you more short of breath. Ask your doctor to refer you for treatment if you have not been given advice by a physiotherapist.

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## Who should I contact if I do not have a physiotherapist?

If you speak to your GP, asthma nurse or hospital specialist they should be able to refer you to a physiotherapist who specialises in breathing problems.

## Useful Contacts

Your physiotherapist is \_\_\_\_\_

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care: [www.acprc.org.uk](http://www.acprc.org.uk)

British Thoracic Society:  
[www.brit-thoracic.org.uk](http://www.brit-thoracic.org.uk)

British Lung Foundation:  
[www.lunguk.org](http://www.lunguk.org)

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy:  
[www.csp.org.uk](http://www.csp.org.uk)

The Canadian Lung Association:  
[http://www.lung.ca/diseases-maladies/copd-mpoc\\_e.php](http://www.lung.ca/diseases-maladies/copd-mpoc_e.php);

NHS free smoking helpline **0800 0224332**  
[www.smokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.smokefree.nhs.uk)