



Pulmonary rehabilitation and exercise



**British
Lung
Foundation**



**Hope and
support
at every
step**

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We value feedback on our information. To let us know your views, and for the most up to date version of this information and references, call the helpline or visit www.blf.org.uk

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We feature real life stories in this booklet. Some names have been changed and some pictures are posed by models. The information in this booklet has been reviewed by independent experts. We have made every effort to ensure that the information provided is correct. The British Lung Foundation cannot accept liability for any errors or omissions, and policy, practice or medical research may change. If you are concerned about your health, you should consult a doctor or for more information consult the sources listed.



Helpline: 03000 030 555
www.blf.org.uk
helpline@blf.org.uk

This information is taken from our booklet
Living with a lung condition: how exercise and eating well can make a difference to your life.

It is for people living with a lung condition in the UK and your family and carers.

If you have a lung condition, taking part in a pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) programme is the best way to learn how to exercise at the right level for you.

It is a programme of exercise and education for people with long-term lung conditions. It combines physical exercise sessions with discussion and advice on lung health and is designed to help you to manage the symptoms of your condition, including getting out of breath.

The booklet explains:

- **why it is important for you to exercise**
- **how PR can help you to learn how to exercise and cope better with a lung condition**
- **how to continue to exercise after PR**

Part 1: Exercise

Why is exercise important for people with a lung condition?

If you have a lung condition, being active and exercising can help you to improve your breathing, your fitness and your quality of life. Exercise may even allow you to re-discover activities you thought you could no longer do.

“I knew the exercise was working when I went to Cornwall and walked to the beach without stopping as usual.” Colin

Be as active as you can and learn how to exercise at the right level for you, and you will feel the benefits throughout your life. As well as increasing your overall fitness, strengthening your muscles and helping you cope with breathlessness, regular exercise **improves:**

- your ability to resist infections
- your ability to do daily activities
- the strength of your bones
- the strength of the muscles that you breathe with
- the strength of your heart muscles and your circulation
- your energy levels
- your well-being and confidence

“I feel able to tackle things now. I have good days and bad days still, but I can now go out shopping with my sister or on my own.” Frances



Exercise also helps **reduce**:

- feelings of anxiety or depression
- blood pressure
- risk of falling
(by improving your balance)
- risk of diabetes
- risk of arthritis
- risk of heart disease and stroke
- stress levels

“I feel better in my body and mind, I am much more confident about what I can do. Exercise has saved my life!” Roy

If you have a lung condition, taking part in a pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) programme is the best way to learn how to exercise at the right level for you, see page 11.

What do we mean by exercise?

It's important to know the difference between **exercise** and **physical activity**.

Physical activity is ordinary, everyday movement and activity, such as walking to the shops, housework or light gardening.

Exercise is specific, targeted activity, with the aim of making a particular change. For example, going for a brisk walk or taking part in an exercise class are types of exercise. Certain exercises can make your thigh muscles stronger, making it easier for you to stand up and sit down. Others will make you generally fitter, or your walking muscles stronger, so you can walk further, faster or both.

Being physically active brings benefits, especially if you move more and sit less. If you exercise as well, you can achieve bigger improvements to your fitness and strength, which will improve your breathing and your general well-being. You will get most benefit by gradually increasing the time you are active and you exercise.

“Before I was diagnosed I didn’t exercise as such, but once I realised the benefits that physical activity can have on my condition, my outlook completely changed and I have become far more motivated. Through activity I have learnt to live with my condition.” Hazel

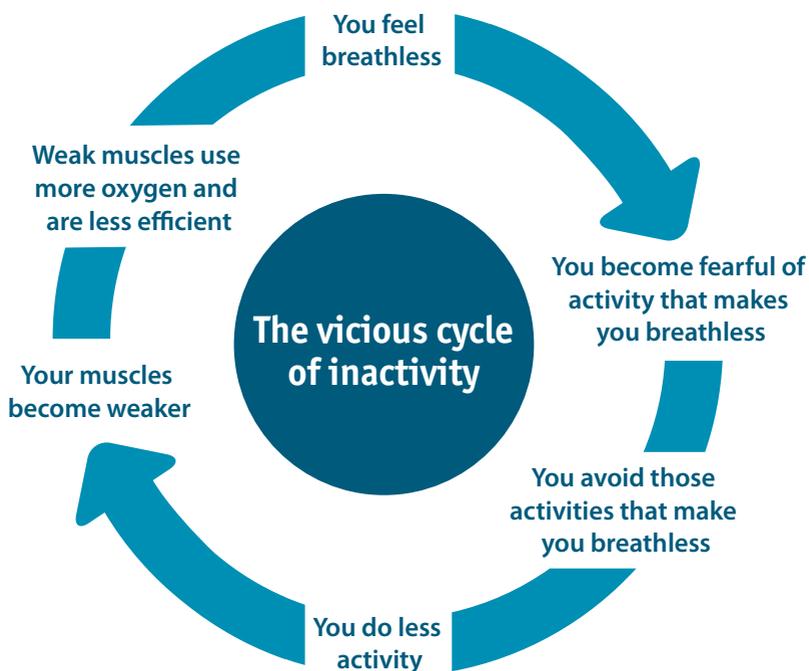
Fact or fiction?

Feeling out of breath can be good for you

Many people may find it surprising, but **getting breathless when you exercise is good for you**. Exercising will help you to increase fitness and strengthen your muscles so you feel less breathless during everyday tasks.

Exercising regularly will make your muscles stronger, including your breathing muscles, so they need less oxygen to do the same amount of work. Weaker muscles require more oxygen to work. If you avoid physical activity that makes you breathless, your muscles will become weaker and you will become more breathless.

Regular exercise will help you to manage feeling out of breath, and break the vicious cycle of inactivity.



What if I get breathless?

Getting breathless when you exercise is normal, whether you have a lung condition or not. It is recommended for all people on a regular basis for general health improvement. If you get breathless during everyday activities, exercise will help reduce how breathless you feel during daily tasks such as getting dressed or walking to the bus stop.

There are several breathing techniques that you can use when you exercise to help you control your breathing. You might be taught different techniques depending on your condition. You can ask your specialist respiratory physiotherapist about these. Here are some examples:

- **Blow as you go:** breathe out when you are making a big effort, such as standing up, stretching or bending.
- **Pursed-lips breathing:** breathe out with your lips pursed as if you were whistling.

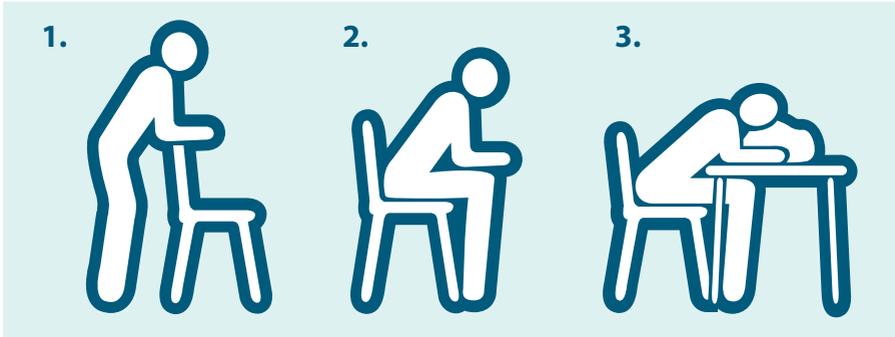
Tip:
It's important
to remember
to relax.

Try to be as calm and relaxed as you can, so you don't waste energy. This will also help to keep the small muscles in your airways relaxed, keeping them as open as possible.

You need to support your shoulders and arms in a relaxed way without gripping on to things, to allow the muscles in your shoulders and neck to work more efficiently as extra 'breathing' muscles. Tensing these muscles will use more oxygen and may increase your breathlessness.

“Being breathless is normal. When you exercise and push yourself, you become breathless. The important thing is to pace yourself and be able to understand and identify your limits.” Ron

If you get so short of breath when you are physically active or exercising that you need a breather, there are certain positions that you might find helpful to reduce breathlessness (see diagrams below). For example:



1. Standing leaning forward: Lean forwards resting your elbows onto a wall, a windowsill, a railing or the back of a chair.

2. and 3. Sitting leaning forward: Sit leaning forward with your elbows resting on your knees. Make your wrists and hands go limp. You can rest your head and arms on pillow on a table when you are really short of breath.

Standing leaning back or sideways: Lean back or sideways against a wall, with your feet slightly apart and about one foot (30cm) away from the wall. Let your hands hang loosely by your sides or rest them in your pockets. You may prefer to rest your hands or thumbs on your belt loops or waistband, or across the shoulder strap of your handbag.

The Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care publishes patient information leaflets on breathing exercises and positions to reduce breathlessness. You can access these at www.acprc.org.uk/publications or by calling the BLF Helpline on 03000 030 555.



Important points to remember:

- Before you start any form of exercise, you should speak to your doctor, nurse or another health care professional to ensure it is safe for you to exercise. They can refer you to a local service.
- For most people with a lung condition, the best way to learn how to exercise at the right level for them is to take part in a pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) programme.
- Pace yourself. Try doing a variety of exercises to prevent tiring out one set of muscles too quickly or getting unpleasantly breathless. Work at a pace that allows you to exercise for longer. For example, you could do some exercise in the morning and some later in the day.
- It is not dangerous to feel out of breath when exercising. This is a normal response to exercise, you will recover. See the talk test on the next page to check how to find the correct level of breathlessness for you. Breathing techniques can help you control your breathing.
- For a small number of patients whose oxygen levels drop when exercising, portable oxygen may increase how much exercise you are able to do. However, not everyone can benefit, so it is very important to be assessed by your health care professional before receiving oxygen treatment.



The talk test

When you are exercising, try saying out loud:

“This exercise programme is going to do me good!”

You should be able to say the sentence with two or three stops for breath.

- If you can say the whole sentence without stopping, you are not working hard enough!
- If you can't speak, or say more than one word at a time, you are working too hard.

Part 2:

Pulmonary rehabilitation (PR)

PR is a programme of exercise and education for people with long-term lung conditions provided by the NHS and, in some areas, privately. It combines physical exercise sessions with discussion and advice on lung health, and is designed to help you to manage the symptoms of your condition, including getting out of breath.

A course of PR lasts about six to eight weeks, with two sessions a week. Each session usually lasts between one-and-a-half and two hours. You will be part of a group, commonly between eight and 16 people.

PR will:

- help to improve your muscle strength, so you can use the oxygen you breathe more efficiently.
- improve your general fitness and help you to cope better with feeling out of breath.
- help you to feel stronger and fitter, more confident and able to do more.

Please bear in mind, however, your lung function is not likely to change, so you might not see a difference when you take the simple 'blowing test'. This is also called a spirometry test.

“Pulmonary rehabilitation is the most beneficial treatment I have received...not only for the exercise provided but more importantly for the education given.” Colin

Who should go to pulmonary rehabilitation?

PR is aimed at people who have breathing difficulties caused by a lung condition that affects their ability to do normal activities. Most people who go to PR have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Some studies have shown that people with asthma and other long-term lung diseases such as bronchiectasis or idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF) also benefit.

Your age and the severity of your condition will not stop you from taking part in PR or from seeing an improvement. Completing a course of PR is a good way to learn how to exercise at the right level for you. Research tells us that PR leads to improvements in your ability to walk further and in your quality of life. PR should help you to feel less breathless doing day-to-day activities, such as walking up stairs, shopping and dressing. You should feel less tired too.

“When I started the course, I could barely walk 500 metres before becoming too breathless to continue. By the end of six weeks, I could walk 1500 metres. It’s not about getting better; it’s about living better with my condition.” John

Taking part will help you learn how to exercise in a safe and sociable environment. Most people enjoy the programme, gain confidence and benefit from meeting others in a similar situation and sharing their experiences. Some PR courses are held in a hospital, but often they take place in community halls, leisure centres or health centres.

“Thank you for giving me my life back.” Val

How do I get pulmonary rehabilitation?

The first step is to ask your GP to be referred to your local programme. You can also ask your practice nurse, your respiratory team or chest clinic. Pulmonary rehabilitation should be available across the UK, but some programmes will have waiting lists, so the sooner you act, the sooner you start.

While you are waiting you can get in touch with your local respiratory team or PR team for advice. They should be able to give you some general information over the telephone or as part of your care. You can also ask your GP for an assessment of your fitness to exercise and for a referral to an activity you want to take part in. You can also find your nearest BLF Active class, see page 21.



What happens in a pulmonary rehabilitation course?

During your course, your PR team will teach you how to increase your level of activity safely and effectively, and manage breathlessness and feelings of anxiety or panic. Your team will be made up of trained health care professionals such as physiotherapists, nurses and occupational therapists.

A typical PR course will always start with an **assessment of your health and abilities**. Ideally, this assessment will take place a week or two before you start your course.

The health care professionals taking you through the course will ask questions to understand you and your body, and help you get the best out of the course. They will want to find out:

- what you can and cannot do;
- how activity affects you; and
- how you are feeling and coping with your condition.

At each **session**, you will spend about half the time on **physical exercise**. This will be carefully designed according to your needs, so that it provides just the right level of activity for you. The rest of the time will be spent providing **information and tips** about living with a lung condition and getting the best out of life. These discussions will take place in a friendly, supportive atmosphere. Topics might include:

- breathing techniques to use when recovering your breath, during physical activity or if you feel anxious
- why exercise is so important for people with lung conditions
- how to manage stress

- healthy eating
- how to use your inhalers and other medicines
- what to do when you are unwell

Being with other people who have similar problems to you can also be very helpful, as well as making sessions enjoyable and fun. Group members often share useful tips with one another.

You will get out of breath when you take part in a PR course, but this is part of the therapy. You will always be monitored and you will not be asked to do more than you can do safely.

PR is about helping you manage your condition better. It is not a cure, but you will feel better and more confident and in control. PR requires your commitment to really work. You need to attend sessions regularly and follow the advice given by your team.

Tip:
Ask your PR team about ways you can continue to exercise after the course.

After you have completed your course, it is important to carry on exercising regularly, stay active and use the techniques you have learned.

“I am loving this group. We do as much exercise as we can for the first hour, then a cuppa and a talk. Brilliant. It has helped so much to lift my spirits.” Jude



Important points to remember:

- PR is designed for people who have breathing difficulties caused by a lung condition and should be available across the UK. Ask for a referral from your doctor, nurse, respiratory team or chest clinic.
- PR combines a physical exercise programme with advice on lung health to enable you to find the right level of exercise for you and help you understand and better manage your condition.
- You will get out of breath during the course; this is part of the therapy.
- PR is not a cure, but you will feel better and more in control.
- After you have completed your course, it is important to carry on exercising regularly, stay active and use the techniques you have learned.

Part 3:

Ways to keep exercising

After your PR course, it is important to continue to exercise regularly at the right level for you. There are several ways to do this:

- your PR team might refer you to a follow-up programme of exercise
- your physiotherapist, doctor, nurse or respiratory health care professional might refer you onto further exercise under an exercise referral scheme
- you could join a group exercise class run by a specialist respiratory fitness instructor
- you could join in with community activity in your area
- you could exercise at home

Before you start any form of exercise, you should speak to your doctor, nurse or respiratory health care professional, who can provide a referral to show that you are fit to attend. Make sure the organisers of your activity know about your condition.

Exercise referral schemes

Exercise referral schemes are run by a local authority, health service or a charity. Most are run in partnership with the NHS. Under these schemes, health care professionals can refer their patients to fitness instructors who are trained to provide exercise to people with long-term health conditions. You can find more information about these schemes at **www.blf.org.uk/exercising**

Specialist respiratory fitness instructors

There are specialist fitness instructors who provide safe and appropriate exercise to people with lung disease. They may also be called:

- a (specialist) respiratory fitness instructor
- a CRDE (chronic respiratory disease exercise) instructor
- a pulmonary fitness instructor
- a BLF Active fitness instructor

Most respiratory instructors provide group exercise classes in a community venue, such as a local gym. They also often work for exercise referral schemes.

You can contact a fitness instructor directly to find out about privately run classes in your area. You can search the BLF list of instructors and find more information about specialist respiratory fitness instructors online at www.blf.org.uk/exercising or call the BLF Helpline.

Lita Freegard, specialist instructor, gives the key to her success:

“I have a passion: the key is to be patient but persistent, and the message is the same every week: do as much as you can and keep coming to the sessions. I also believe that little and often is achievable. All journeys start with the first step.”



BLF Active
Instructor

Supporter
mascot

BLF Active

BLF Active enables people with lung conditions to access exercise tailored for them.

It provides people finishing pulmonary rehabilitation with the opportunity to continue exercising safely. It does this by:

- signposting people to exercise classes and respiratory instructors in their area
- providing information about ways to get active with a lung condition
- researching and documenting other ways to stay active with a lung condition, such as dancing, walking and singing
- providing tools for instructors to set up classes

There are about 145 BLF Active instructors around the UK qualified to run exercise classes for people with lung conditions.

You can find out more at www.blf.org.uk/active or call the BLF Helpline on **03000 030 555**.

“ Instead of antibiotics every seven to eight weeks I have gone 18 months without needing any since starting BLF Active exercise.” Mary

“I start with a group warm up using Zumba music for a feel-good factor. We then have a session with strengthening and aerobic stations to make it easier to accommodate individual needs and monitor their progress. I am always on hand to help each client.”
Barbara, BLF Active instructor

What should I expect from an exercise class?

Exercise classes will usually:

- last for about one hour;
- include exercises that are tailored to each person's abilities and goals;
- be designed to improve walking and help manage breathlessness;
- be held in safe, accessible venues; and
- provide a fun and social environment.

When you take part in an exercise class, it should include:

- **Warm up:** simple, gentle body movements to get your muscles, joints and heart warmed up, ready for activity
- **Aerobic work:** a workout for the whole body that raises your heart rate and makes you a bit breathless, such as exercises that get you moving your legs. These include walking, cycling or climbing stairs
- **Resistance work:** using weights or resistance bands to strengthen your muscles
- **Cool down:** as with warm up, this involves slower, gentler activity that allows your body to gradually return to normal after exercise
- **Stretching:** stretching your muscles after they have worked will reduce any soreness from exercise and helps keep them in better shape to work next time

“Before starting the exercise class three months ago I was too breathless to even wash my hair. Now I can do it on my own.” George

Community activity

You might be surprised at the number of different activities available in your area that are suitable for people with a lung condition. You could go with friends or make new friends – exercising in a group is fun, sociable and motivating.

- **Walking** can be a great way to keep fit and socialise. Your health care professional may know about appropriate walks in your area, and can refer you directly or through an exercise referral scheme. Local councils should have information on walks in your area, or you could try some of the organisations listed on page 26.
- **Activities in your community:** Local authority and private gyms offer opportunities to try out exercise classes or use their facilities. Activities can include swimming, yoga, tai chi, dance and tennis.
- Some people with a lung condition find that **singing** is helpful for breathing and general well-being. You don't need a lot of breath and can build up your stamina through vocal exercises and songs. Recent research has suggested that the way we sing helps us to breathe in a deeper and controlled way.

If you are interested in joining a singing group, visit www.blf.org.uk/singing



Exercising at home

It is important for everyone, including people with lung conditions, to be regularly physically active. But before you look to increase the amount you exercise or take on new activities, you should speak to your doctor, nurse or other health care professional to ensure it is safe for you to exercise.

If you have already been assessed by a respiratory physiotherapist, or are taking part in PR, or have completed a PR course, you will know what level of exercise is right for you to maintain or improve your fitness levels. You can find exercises and advice in our exercise handbook to help you.

You should bear in mind these safety considerations:

- warm up before exercising and cool down afterwards
- carry your inhaler while exercising, if you use one
- wear loose, comfortable clothing and supportive, non-slip shoes
- wait for at least an hour after eating before exercising and drink plenty of water
- stop exercising if you get chest pains or tightness; if you feel dizzy or nauseous, clammy or cold; or if you feel increasingly wheezy or if your joints or muscles hurt.

You can order an exercise handbook at www.blf.org.uk/exercise or by calling the BLF Helpline on **03000 030 555**





Important points to remember:

- To maintain the benefits of PR, you should keep exercising the way you were shown.
- You can ask to be referred to more exercise, or you can find your own.
- A good starting point is to find a specialist respiratory fitness instructor.
- Always tell the organiser of your chosen activity about your condition.
- Feeling out of breath while exercising is a normal response. Use the talk test on page 9 to make sure you are working at the right level for you.

If your doctor says physical activity is not suitable for you, you can call the BLF Helpline on **03000 030 555** or ask your health care professional about other things that might help improve your quality of life. For example:

- Join a BLF Breathe Easy support group
- Join our web community at **www.blf.org.uk/forum**
- Become a BLF penpal to talk to others in a similar situation

Further help and support

Go to www.gov.uk to find details of your local council and ask about gyms, community exercise facilities or food delivery services near you.

Walk England has a lot of information on how to get active through walking, plus links to lots of different local opportunities.
www.walkengland.org.uk

The Ramblers Association provides details of many local organised walking groups, catering for all levels of fitness.
www.ramblers.org.uk

Walking For Health aims to encourage people with different levels of fitness to do regular short walks in their local community.
www.walkingforhealth.org.uk

You might also find the following information useful:

- *Living with a lung condition: how exercise and eating well can make a difference to your life*
- *Breathlessness*

For more information on exercise and pulmonary rehabilitation, you can call the BLF Helpline on **03000 030 555**. The specialist nurses and advisors on our helpline can help you to find pulmonary rehabilitation services or exercise classes in your area, offer advice on exercise or answer any questions you may have on any aspect of lung disease or living with a lung condition.

We're here to help

Call our helpline

The specialist nurses and advisers on our helpline are dedicated to answering your questions. Whether it's about finding equipment, your rights, coping with symptoms or if you just need a chat, they are here for you.

Ringing the helpline never costs more than a local call and is usually free, even from a mobile. Lines are open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Find out all about lung disease

We provide clear, trustworthy information about many types of lung disease, as well as advice on managing and living with a lung condition. You can find a range of information in print and online. To order, call the helpline or visit **www.blf.org.uk/support-and-information**

Get support when you need it most

Join one of our local **Breathe Easy** support groups, find a **penpal** to share your experiences with, or take a look at our **web community**. To find out about all of these options and more, call the helpline or visit our website at **www.blf.org.uk**, where you can also sign up to our **newsletter**.

Helpline: 03000 030 555
www.blf.org.uk
enquiries@blf.org.uk



**British
Lung
Foundation**

One person in five in the UK is affected by lung disease. Millions more are at risk.

We are the UK's lung charity and we are here for every one of them, whatever their condition.

Lung disease can be frightening and debilitating. We offer hope and support at every step so that no one has to face it alone.

We promote greater understanding of lung disease and we campaign for positive change in the nation's lung health.

We fund vital research, so that new treatments and cures can help save lives.

We are the British Lung Foundation.
Leading the fight against lung disease.

Get in touch with the British Lung Foundation to find support near you.

73–75 Goswell Road London EC1V 7ER

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