

## **Pulmonary Rehabilitation**

# **Eating well when breathing is difficult**

Many people with breathing problems such as COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), emphysema and chronic bronchitis find that their condition and treatment affect their eating. Maintaining an adequate nutritional intake and well-balanced diet is important to help maintain strength, fitness and help fight any infections.

This leaflet provides information on how to ensure you have a well balanced and adequate nutritional intake when breathing is difficult.

If you find that you have a small appetite, are losing weight or muscle strength or would like to lose weight then please ask to be referred to a Dietitian for more specific and detailed advice and information.

### **Section 1 – Weight management**

It is important to maintain a healthy weight. Being underweight can make you feel weaker and tired. It can also mean you are at an increased risk of infections. In addition, being very overweight can mean that your heart and lungs are working harder to supply oxygen to the body and this can make you increasingly tired.

A Body Mass Index (BMI) is the ratio between your height and weight. Ideally for patients with COPD, a BMI of between 20 to 30kg/m<sup>2</sup> is acceptable. Ask your doctor, nurse or dietitian to check your BMI.



### **Section 2 – Eating well when breathing is difficult**

There may be times when you are eating less than normal. This may be because you complain of a feeling of fullness before you have finished your meal or that eating large meals increases episodes of shortness of breath making it difficult to breathe.

The following advice will provide you with some information to try to improve your nutritional intake during these times:

- Instead of eating three large meals, try eating smaller meals with snacks or nourishing drinks in between. Plan meals to include your favourite foods.
  
- Try having your main meal at lunch time if you are less tired at this time.
  
- Choose meals that are easy to prepare such as:
  - Tinned baked beans on toast
  - Grated cheese on toast
  - Tinned/Cartons of soup with bread
  - Scrambled eggs on toast
  - Pasta with pre-prepared sauces and tinned tuna
  - Tinned Sardines/Pilchards on toast or in pitta breads
  - Jacket Potatoes with grated cheese/tinned tuna/baked beans and prepared salad
  
- Nourishing drinks between meals can help. Try drinks made with full cream milk such as coffee, hot chocolate and malted drinks. Smoothies and fruit juice are also good. Complan or Meritene (previously called 'Build-Up') are recommended if you find you have a small appetite. These can be purchased from supermarkets or over the counter in pharmacy departments and stores.
  
- Have high energy snacks to nibble on throughout the day such as nuts, crisps, cheese, biscuits, chocolate, sweets, dried fruit, puddings and desserts and yogurts. It may be useful to keep some of these within easy reach.

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- Do not skip meals - even if you have no appetite it is still important to eat. Missing meals means your energy levels will fall and your appetite will reduce further. Some people find it helps them to write down what they have eaten, this can also be a good tool in helping you establish when your appetite is better and optimise this.
- Avoid 'low fat' and 'diet' foods as these don't provide enough calories (energy) and protein. Fortify your foods to increase your energy intake. for example:
  - Add margarine, butter or olive oil to potatoes, vegetables and pasta
  - Have custard, cream or condensed/evaporated milk with fruit or puddings
  - Spread mayonnaise into sandwiches and use lots of spread or butter
  - Add extra cream or cheese to potato dishes, soups or pasta
- Gentle exercise and fresh air can help stimulate appetite but take care not to overdo it or you may become too tired to eat.
- Shop when you have most energy. If possible, conserve energy by asking someone to help you shop, drive you there, asking if the shop will deliver, or using internet shopping.
- Eat while sitting upright, preferably at a table, as slumping can cause pressure on your diaphragm. It helps to eat in a calm environment and to take small bites. Take your time to eat your meals.
- Foods that are softer or easy to chew can help you conserve energy so breathing is easier. These include:
  - Tinned or stewed fruit with cream or custard
  - Porridge or oat cereal made with full cream milk
  - Scrambled, poached or boiled egg, omelettes
  - Baked beans, tinned pasta such as spaghetti in tomato sauce, ravioli, macaroni cheese, soup
  - Jacket potato without the skin or sandwich made without crusts with one of the following fillings:

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- Cream cheese or grated hard cheese
  - Sardines or pilchards (remove any bones)
  - Tuna or mashed hard boiled eggs mixed with mayonnaise
  - Corned beef hash, shepherd's or cottage pie
  - Fisherman's pie or fish with a white or butter sauce
  - Stew or casseroles or curries using beef, lamb, pork, chicken or root vegetables
  - Cheese and potato bake, cauliflower or macaroni cheese
  - Spaghetti bolognese, lasagne or meat balls in sauce
  - Lentil dhal or aloo gobi, risotto.
  - Jelly, rice pudding, semolina, sago, custard, mousse, custard
  - Ice cream, sorbet, frozen yoghurt
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- Remember it is normal to stop breathing momentarily to swallow but be sure to breathe while you are chewing. If it becomes difficult to breathe use pursed lip breathing until you catch your breath.
  - Clear your airways of mucus before eating. This will help you breathe better and so you will have more energy for eating.
  - If you find that your appetite continues to remain small, then please ask your nurse or doctor to refer you to a Dietitian. There are some prescribable nutritional supplement drinks that can be made available through the Dietitian.

### **Section 3 - Fluid intake**

It is very important for people with COPD to keep well hydrated as it makes mucus (sputum or secretions) less sticky and can help you to clear your chest as coughing is easier. Thick mucus is a sign of dehydration.

- Try to drink 8-10 mugs of non-alcoholic fluid a day even if it means an extra visit to the toilet.
- Try keeping a jug or bottle within reach. This will help keep you hydrated, especially during challenging days

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- Avoid drinking before meals as this can fill you up. Instead, drink after you have eaten, if you can. If you need to sip water while you eat to help food go down continue to do this.
- Remember if you have lost weight try to choose high energy drinks such as Meritene, Complan, milky drinks and **not** low-calorie drinks such as diet drinks or lots of tea and coffee (unless made with milk).

### Section 4 – Dry mouth

A dry mouth can be common when using oxygen, nebulisers or inhalers. This can make chewing and swallowing more difficult and can make it harder to taste your food. If your mouth is dry you don't have as much saliva which is needed to help your taste buds work and also helps with chewing and swallowing.

- Try taking regular sips of drink during the day.
- Choose soft, moist foods e.g. soups, cottage pie, fish pie. Moisten sandwiches with tomatoes, mayonnaise, salad cream, salad dressing or sauces.
- You may wish to avoid foods which stick to your mouth and can be difficult to swallow, such as pastry, chocolate, fresh white bread or mashed potato.
- Use gravy and sauces, for example, parsley sauce, cheese sauce.
- Serve puddings with custard, white sauce, cream etc.
- Citrus foods can stimulate saliva flow. Try lemon, orange, grapefruit flavoured drinks, desserts and sweets. Try bitter lemon or still, old-fashioned lemonade.
- Try to stimulate saliva flow by sucking:
  - boiled sweets, mints or pastilles or try chewing gum
  - fresh fruit such as pineapple pieces or grapefruit
  - ice lollies or ice cubes made from fruit juice or fruit squash

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- If your lips are dry, use lip balms or a water-based cream (aqueous) to keep them moist. Do **not** use petroleum jelly such as Vaseline or any chemists' own brand if you are using oxygen.
- If the problem continues speak to your doctor who may recommend the use of artificial saliva gels, sprays or pastilles.
- Saliva helps to protect your teeth from decay and gum disease. It is important to keep your mouth clean and fresh by brushing teeth, gums, tongue and dentures twice a day with a toothbrush.
- After eating, rinse your mouth with water or chew sugar free chewing gum to help clean debris from teeth. If possible, avoid mouth washes that contain alcohol. Ask your dentist, nurse or doctor for more advice on mouth care.

### **Section 5 - Preventing osteoporosis (thinning of the bones)**

People who take steroid tablets (e.g. prednisolone) for a long time can be at increased risk of osteoporosis (fragile bones).

To help to protect your bones it is essential to have an adequate intake of calcium and Vitamin D. Vitamin D helps the body use calcium and is found in oily fish, egg yolks, fortified breakfast cereals, margarine and also from sunshine.

It is now recommended that all adults and children over one consider taking a 10microgram supplement of Vitamin D daily, especially during the autumn and winter period. For those aged over 65, it may be more suitable to take a 10microgram Vitamin D supplement all year round as our skin becomes less effective in creating Vitamin D as we age.

If you do not get sufficient exposure to sunlight you may need a vitamin D supplement. For example, those who spend most of their time indoors, those with darker skin or who cover their skin when outside.

If you have any concerns, please speak to your doctor, pharmacist or Dietitian.

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**The recommended daily intake of calcium is 700mg, or 1000mg for people at higher risk of osteoporosis, or 1200mg for people with osteoporosis.**

The best sources of calcium are dairy products. Some people avoid milk because they feel it thickens their mucus. Milk is a thick drink but there is no evidence that it actually thickens mucus and it is best to include it if you can. If you find milk is a problem for you, try having a few sips of water, or rinse your mouth out after having a milky drink. If your mucus is thick, try drinking more fluid.

If you are using dairy substitutes and alternative dairy products, always check the product labelling to ensure it is fortified with sufficient calcium.

If you are able to, then weight bearing exercise such as walking, gentle aerobics and cycling can help to keep bones healthy as well as improving overall health.

The table below shows the amounts of calcium in some calcium-rich foods. This list is not exhaustive. If you need help working out your intake, or if you are unable to eat the required amount, please ask to see a Dietitian.

### Calcium content of common foods

<b>Food and Portion Size</b>	<b>Calcium per portion (mg)</b>
<b>Dairy sources</b>	
1/3 pint milk (or calcium enriched soya milk)	240
1 oz (30g) hard cheese	200
Serving of milk pudding (200g)	250
Serving of custard (120g)	200
Small yogurt	180

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Small soya 'yogurt'	120
Serving of ice cream (60g)	100
Small pot of fromage frais	85
Small pot of cottage cheese	80
<b>Fish</b>	
4 tinned sardines with bones (100g)	430
2 tinned pilchards with bones (110g)	275
Tinned salmon without bones (100g)	100
Kipper fillet (130g)	85
<b>Fruit and vegetables</b>	
Small tin baked beans	80
Medium orange	75
4 dried figs	170
Tofu –with added calcium sulphate (100g)	510
1 heaped tsp tahini (19g)	130
<b>Cereals</b>	
White or brown bread, medium slice (36g)	65

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Wholemeal bread, medium slice (36g)	40
Fortified Breakfast Cereals average serving	70
Muesli medium portion	44
<b>Confectionary</b>	
Fruit cake (90g)	70
Milk chocolate (small bar)	135
White chocolate (small bar)	170
Kit Kat	40

## Contacts

For further information, please use the contact numbers below:

Dietetic Department UHCW: 024 7696 6161

Dietetic Department Rugby St Cross: 01788 663473

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 6161 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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### Document History

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