

Nutrition and Dietetics

Eating well when breathing is difficult

Many people with breathing problems such as COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), emphysema and chronic bronchitis find their illness can make it hard to eat enough.

Getting enough energy and nutrients as part of a well-balanced diet is important to help you to stay strong and fit, and to fight infections.

Being under weight or overweight can be unhelpful.

Please ask your GP to refer you to a dietitian if:

- you have a small appetite,
- you are losing weight or muscle strength
- you would like to lose weight

Weight management

Being a healthy weight can help you feel better. Being underweight can make you feel weaker and tired. It can also make you more likely to get infections.

Being very overweight can mean that your heart and lungs are working harder to supply oxygen to the body, which can make you feel tired.



Patient Information

Working out your Body Mass Index (BMI) can help you to find out whether you are a healthy weight for your height. Ideally for people with COPD, a BMI of between 20 to 30kg/m² is advisable.

Ask your doctor, nurse or dietitian to check your BMI.

Eating well when breathing is difficult

There may be times when you are eating less than normal. This may be because you feel full before you have finished your meal, or because eating large meals makes you feel more out of breathe.

Sometimes eating makes breathing feel more difficult.

Advice for eating well when breathing is difficult

The following advice aims to help improve your eating and drinking when breathing is difficult.

Have smaller, more frequent meals

Instead of eating three large meals, try eating smaller meals with snacks or nourishing drinks (drinks which contain additional energy and/or protein) in between. Plan meals to include your favourite foods.

Try changing the time of your main meal to when you are least tired.

Choose easy to prepare meals

Choose meals that are easier 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

Patient Information

- Jacket Potatoes with grated cheese/tinned tuna/baked beans and prepared salad

Nourishing drinks

Nourishing drinks between meals can help to make sure you get enough calories.

Try drinks made with full cream milk such as coffee, hot chocolate, and malted drinks.

Smoothies and fruit juice are also good choices.

Complan and Meritene (previously called 'Build-Up') are brands which offer drinks and soups which are higher in calories and protein. These 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

- Have high energy snacks throughout the day, such as nuts, crisps, cheese, biscuits, chocolate, sweets, dried fruit, puddings, desserts and yogurts. Keep some of these in easy reach, and take some with you when you are not at home

Don't skip meals

Do not skip meals, even if you don't feel hungry. 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, which can also help you to work out when your appetite is better and to take advantage of these times.

Patient Information

Avoid 'low fat' and 'diet' foods

Avoid 'low fat' and 'diet' foods. These may not provide enough calories (energy) and protein.

Fortify your foods

Add extra calories and protein to your foods and drinks. This is called fortification. Please see examples below:

- 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

Do gentle exercise

Gentle exercise and fresh air can help stimulate your appetite.

Take care not to overdo it, as you may become too tired to eat.

Shopping

Shop when you have the most energy. If possible, save energy by asking someone to help you shop, drive you there, asking if the shop will deliver, or using online shopping.

Sit upright when you eat

Eat while sitting upright, preferably at a table. Slumping can cause you to feel more breathless (by putting pressure on your diaphragm).

It helps to eat in a calm environment and to take small bites.

Take your time to eat your meals.

Patient Information

Try easy to chew foods

Foods that are softer or easy to chew can help you save 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, or omelettes
- Baked beans, tinned pasta such as spaghetti in tomato sauce, ravioli, macaroni cheese, soup

Also, try jacket potato without the skin, or sandwiches made without crusts with one of the following fillings:

- 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, aloo gobi or risotto.
- Jelly, rice pudding, semolina, sago, custard, mousse
- Ice cream, sorbet, frozen yoghurt

Be sure to breathe while you are chewing. Remember, it is normal to stop breathing for a short moment to swallow.

If it becomes difficult to breathe, use pursed lip breathing until you catch your breath.

Patient Information

Clear mucus from your airways

Clear mucus from your airways before eating. This will help you breathe better, to allow you to have more energy for eating.

If you find that your appetite continues to remain small, ask your nurse or doctor to refer you to a dietitian. There are some nutritional supplements which your dietitian may prescribe for you.

Fluid intake

It is very important for people with COPD to drink plenty of water, to make sure they stay hydrated.

Being well hydrated makes mucus (sputum or secretions) less sticky. This can also help you to clear your chest as it makes coughing easier.

Thick mucus is a sign that you may not be drinking enough water (dehydration).

Advice to increase your fluid intake

Drink 8-10 glasses of fluid a day

Try to drink 8-10 glasses of non-alcoholic fluid a day, even if this makes you visit the toilet more often.

Keep a bottle of fluid nearby

Try keeping a jug or bottle within reach. This will help keep you to drink enough fluid to stay hydrated, especially during more difficult days

Avoid drinking before meals

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 to go down, continue to do this

Patient Information

Choose high calorie drinks if you have lost weight

Remember if you have lost weight try to choose high energy drinks such as Meritene, Complan and milky drinks.

Try not to have low-calorie drinks such as diet drinks or lots of tea and coffee (unless made with milk)

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. Saliva also helps with chewing and swallowing.

Advice to make your mouth feel less dry

Regular sips of drink

Try taking regular sips of drink during the day.

Choose soft moist foods

Choose soft, moist foods such as soups, cottage pie, fish pie.

Moisten sandwiches with tomatoes, mayonnaise, salad cream, salad dressing or sauces.

Avoid 'sticky' foods

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.

Patient Information

Increase saliva flow

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

Try citrus foods

Citrus foods can help you to produce saliva.

Try lemon, orange, or grapefruit flavoured drinks, desserts and sweets.

Try bitter lemon or still, old-fashioned lemonade.

Use lip balm or water-based cream for dry lips

If your lips are dry, use lip balms or a water-based cream 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 suggest the use of artificial saliva gels, sprays, or pastilles.

Good oral hygiene

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 keep your teeth clean.

Patient Information

Avoid mouth washes that contain alcohol if possible.

Ask your dentist, nurse or doctor for more advice on mouth care.

Lowering your chances of developing osteoporosis (thinning of the bones)

People who take steroid tablets (such as prednisolone) for a long time can have a higher chance of developing osteoporosis (fragile bones).

To help to protect your bones, it is essential to have enough calcium and Vitamin D.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps the body to use calcium. It is found in oily fish, egg yolks, fortified breakfast cereals and margarine.

We can also get Vitamin D from sunshine.

It is recommended that all adults and children over one year of age consider taking a 10 microgram supplement of Vitamin D daily, especially during autumn and winter.

For people aged over 65 years, it may be more suitable to take a 10 microgram Vitamin D supplement all year round. As we age, our skin becomes less able to make Vitamin D.

If you do not get enough exposure to sunlight, you may need a vitamin D supplement. This may be the case if:

- you spend most of your time indoors
- you have darker skin
- you cover your skin when outside

If you have any concerns or questions about the above section, please speak to your doctor, pharmacist, or dietitian.

Patient Information

Calcium

It is recommended that most people have 700mg of calcium each day.

People at **higher risk of osteoporosis** should have **1000mg of calcium a day**.

People affected by osteoporosis should have **1200mg of calcium a day**.

Dairy products usually contain more calcium than other food groups.

Some people do not drink milk because they feel it thickens their mucus. Milk is a thick drink, but there is no proof that it thickens mucus. For this reason, it is best to include milk 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, always check the product's label, to make sure the product has added calcium.

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

The table on the next page shows some foods which are high in calcium, including the amount of calcium in them.

This list is not exhaustive- there are many other foods which contain calcium.

Patient Information

Please ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian if:

- if you need help working out how much calcium you get from food, fluids, and supplements
- if you are unable to eat the amount recommended

A guide to calcium in foods

Food and Portion Size	Calcium per portion (mg)
Dairy sources	240
1/3 pint milk (or calcium enriched soya milk)	
1 oz (30g) hard cheese	200
Serving of milk pudding (200g)	250
Serving of custard (120g)	200
Small yogurt	180
Small soya 'yogurt'	120
Serving of ice cream (60g)	100
Small pot of fromage frais	85
Small pot of cottage cheese	80
Fish	
4 tinned sardines with bones (100g)	430
2 tinned pilchards with bones (110g)	275
Tinned salmon without bones (100g)	100
Kipper fillet (130g)	85

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Fruit and vegetables	
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
Cereals	
White or brown bread, medium slice (36g)	65
Whole meal bread, medium slice (36g)	40
Fortified Breakfast Cereals average serving	70
Muesli medium portion	44
Confectionary	
Fruit cake (90g)	70
Milk chocolate (small bar)	135
White chocolate (small bar)	170
Kit Kat	40

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