

Chapter Four: Daily Living With COPD

Men and women with COPD know that any daily activity takes more effort and energy than it normally would. This doesn't necessarily mean you have to completely change your lifestyle, although you can benefit from learning simplified ways of doing household tasks, gardening, and even traveling. The sections in this chapter are filled with principles and tips to help you conserve energy.

Energy Saving Principles

1) Plan Ahead

- Consider the best time and best way to accomplish tasks.
- Try using the same methods each time you do a certain activity to improve your skill and conserve energy.
- Avoid unnecessary steps by gathering everything you need before you start.
- Don't do two tasks back-to-back which require a lot of energy.

2) Prioritize

Schedule your day so that the most important activities get done before you run low on energy. It might be wise to eliminate unnecessary tasks on some days.

3) Pace Yourself

Maintain a steady pace rather than rushing to conserve energy. Scheduling breaks throughout an activity and between tasks can help you complete your day with less strain.

4) Correct Position

- Choose the most comfortable position for each activity.
- Sit down whenever possible and avoid bending over as this interferes with breathing
- Try to push and slide equipment rather than carrying or lifting it.

5) Delegate

Like any good manager, you can get some jobs done by giving them to other people to do.

Tips to Help You Save Energy

- Pursed-lip breathing is probably the best way you can minimize shortness of breath. It slows down your breathing which allows more air to move in and out of your lungs. Use this breathing technique throughout an activity and also during rest periods. When carrying out any tasks, inhale while at rest and exhale while you exert yourself. Be sure to exhale for at least twice as long as you inhale. For example:
- Lifting: Breathe in slowly. Lift and place the object while you breathe out slowly.
- Pushing or pulling: Breathe in slowly. Push or pull the object as you breathe out slowly. Repeat until the job is done.
- Walking uphill or upstairs: Stop and breathe in slowly. Walk a few steps while you breathe out slowly. Keep your breathing even, and keep the same number of steps during each breath.
- Take a bath rather than a shower when possible as standing for any length of time consumes more energy. If showering, use a plastic stool or chair to sit on. Hot water and steam may make you short of breath and could cause drowsiness, so use lukewarm water instead. Keep the door open slightly to help eliminate steam build-up. Bathing is a strenuous activity and using prescribed oxygen while in the bathtub can help.
- You can save energy while shaving, brushing your teeth, washing your face, combing your hair, or applying make-up by sitting on a stool that's high enough for you to see into the mirror. You can even try propping your elbows on the sink.

- Energy-saving shortcuts for dressing include gathering all the clothes and accessories you plan to wear before you begin. Sit down while dressing. It's smarter to clothe your lower body first because it takes more energy. Bring your feet up to you rather than bending down to put on shoes, socks, and pants. Use a footstool for support if necessary.
- Keep a basket or sack at the bottom of the stairs to collect items that must go upstairs.
- Organize your work areas. Place supplies near where they will be used. This includes storing objects at shoulder or waist level to avoid bending or reaching.
- To reduce fatigue, sit down while you work and, whenever possible, use electrical appliances and other energy-saving devices.
- When moving anything heavy or awkward, use a utility cart or wagon.
- Learn to recognize your personal limits and schedule rest periods to prevent fatigue. In fact, whenever you change your body's position, you exert energy. It's a good idea to rest after each movement. This includes even simple chores like standing up and lying down. Be sure to pause at least a second or two between movements.
- Try to notice which jobs make you short of breath. Start a list. While you're resting, think of ways to make your tasks easier.

- Are there services in your community to help with meals, transportation, or housework? Ask your doctor, your nurse, or your local lung association.

Checklist For Travel

Here are a few things you may want to consider before traveling long distance:

- Have I scheduled driving or flying so that rest and relaxation are possible?
- Have I checked the local air quality or pollen index for the area I've decided to visit?
- Have I planned a route to avoid congested urban areas and highways, especially during rush hour?
- Have I considered the climate of possible vacation spots? Keep in mind that excessive heat, cold, dryness, or humidity may cause breathing difficulties.
- Have I checked the altitude of the area, remembering that some respiratory patients experience increased shortness of breath in altitudes over 5000 feet?
- Because allergies are a problem for me, have I planned to travel only in seasons when ragweed, pollen, or other airborne particles are least prevalent?
- Have I packed enough of my prescribed medications to last through the trip and for a few extra days in case I'm delayed? (For air travel, it is wise to carry all medications on board with you and not check them in with luggage.)
- Have I arranged to have my respiratory equipment and cleaning supplies waiting for me upon arrival? (Did I ask the local vendor for the name of a company that can assist me at my destination?)
- Since I use oxygen regularly and plan to travel by plane, did I notify the airline well in advance that I would need oxygen for the flight? (Cabin pressure may be a problem for me and should be discussed with my doctor before flying.)
- Am I carrying emergency identification, such as Medic Alert or a wallet card?
- Am I prepared to follow the guidelines I use at home for day-to-day comfort?