

ASK THE DOCTOR

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I have read this manual. Should I still get my doctor's permission to exercise?

Definitely, yes. But, regardless of how physically fit you may be, your physician should check you out before embarking on an exercise program for one's safety.

Do you feel that exercise will improve my shortness of breath?

Exercise on a regular basis will definitely help you overcome shortness of breath; but, it will not improve one's basic lung volumes. It will, however, improve the overall condition of muscle groups, including the heart, so the body will utilize oxygen more efficiently. Exercise has also been greatly associated with a healthier attitude, giving oneself a feeling of achievement and self-esteem.

Sometimes I feel I'm not getting adequate relief from my bronchoinhaler. How many times a day may I use it safely?

Most bronchoinhalers can be taken on a 4 hour basis. If you should still encounter breathing difficulties at that level of frequency, your physician should be contacted. Something has changed in your system; it could be the environment, humidity, pollen, infection, etc.

You need to be careful of adverse side effects and ineffective relief if bronchoinhalers are used more often than prescribed. If you are taking both aerosol treatments and a metered dose inhaler, you may only take one or the other four hours apart because they are both the same type of breathing medicine, just given in slightly different forms. And, remember to use the spacer chamber for your metered dose inhaler. (See pages 46 - 48 for proper use the the metered-dose inhaler.)

If I am hyperventilating, should I breathe into a paper bag?

No. If you hyperventilate, it could be a signal that something is wrong and rebreathing air from a paper bag is not the answer.

Hyperventilation may occur if you are simply anxious or for other conditions such as infection or retention of fluids. Check with your physician for peace of mind; and, if your hyperventilation is from your over anxious mind, knowing there is no other underlying problem will help you relax.

I use a nasal cannula for oxygen. Should I wear a mask, or continue to use the cannula if I get a head cold?

You probably would benefit from a mask especially

since the cannula may further congest the sinuses. Some people, however, cannot comfortably wear a mask because they feel a smothering sensation.

How much water should I drink?

Everyone, on the average, should drink about 2 quarts of liquid per day. If you become easily congested or have an infection right now, you especially need extra fluids.

If you have leg edema, consult your physician for you may have electrolyte problems or CHF (congestive heart failure) in which too much fluid could aggravate your system. Your doctor may also advise you to eliminate salt and high sodium foods from your diet since high sodium diets tend to cause the body to retain fluids.

I just can't seem to learn the art of diaphragmatic breathing. What should I do?

Diaphragmatic breathing is an extremely important technique. It may be difficult to practice it all the time, especially if you are short of breath. Some people simply need more practice than others. Practice with a therapist if you possibly can and carefully read, reread and practice following the directions in this manual.

I must sleep sitting up or else I become short of breath. I don't have a cold. What's wrong?

This may indicate several conditions which may or may not be temporary and is a normal way to sleep for many people with COPD. When you lay flat, you may lose some of your lung volume because the diaphragm pushes up against the bases of the lungs. A person may also need to sleep more elevated if he/she has a heart problem because the heart has

to work harder in order to pump blood throughout the body and lungs when the person is reclining.

I have sinus and get congested the minute I lie down. Is it better for me to rest with my head elevated?

When a person is suffering acute sinusitis, he/she may have to rest sitting up until the problem is corrected. He/she may need antibiotics and/or the use of antihistamines under proper supervision.

Those suffering from either acute or chronic sinusitis may benefit from normal saline nasal lavages. You may either prepare your own normal saline solution (See page 58.), or buy it prepared from the drug store. Simply inhale a small amount of the solution into your nose and spit it out through the mouth. You may repeat as often as necessary for it will not harm you.

Should I be concerned if my ankles or other parts of my body become swollen?

Yes, this may be an indication that there is a strain on your heart; however, it doesn't always mean you have congestive heart failure. If you take steroids, anti-inflammatory drugs, it could cause you to retain fluids. Swelling, edema, is usually symetric unless you have an underlying venous disease which may effect your circulation causing swelling in only one leg or the other.

You may feel more short of breath when you retain fluids; therefore, your doctor may prescribe water pills (diuretics) and prescribe a low sodium diet. You should contact your doctor if the swelling is not significantly reduced or gone after a night's rest.

I use continuous *oxygen* via a nasal cannula. How many hours daily do I really need to use it because I really don't feel short of breath all the time?

Technically, you should use your *oxygen* at least 15 hours daily to prevent cor pulmonale (right side heart failure). Optimal use is 18 hours or more. When your physician prescribed continuous *oxygen*, he didn't mean that you could never go without *oxygen*. However, to get the full benefit of *oxygen*, it is best to use it as much as possible.

When should I call my doctor?

Anytime you notice a change in your body which may suggest an infection, call your doctor. Change in the color of your sputum, quantity of sputum, increased cough, increased shortness of breath, chest pain, fever may all be signs of infection.

Your doctor should also be contacted if you feel your medication is not working or if you are experiencing any side effects from your medication. You should actually call your doctor's office in any medical situation in which you need his/her advice.

If I'm fairly certain I have an infection and have an antibiotic on hand, should I begin taking it?

If at all possible call your doctor; however, I have actually given patients antibiotics to keep on hand because they take them so regularly. I still prefer my patients to call me first; but, if for some reason, you cannot reach your doctor or the doctor on call within 12 to 24 hours and you do have an antibiotic on hand which is no more than six months old, begin taking them as prescribed. See your doctor as soon as possible.

Another situation when you may need to take an

antibiotic without first notifying your doctor may occur on a trip. If your doctor knows you have frequent infections and you would like to plan a trip, perhaps he could prescribe an antibiotic in case you develop signs of infection. This must certainly be well planned by both you and your doctor. Always carry an ample supply of medications when traveling.

When I get a new medication, sometimes I feel silly and don't understand how to take it. What should I do?

Don't feel uncomfortable asking questions. The new's media is actually stressing the importance of taking a more active part in your health. If you don't understand something, ask your doctor, nurse or your pharmacist. What seems clear to them may be confusing to you. Have them clarify how to take each medication and what each medication does. Write it down for it is impossible to remember everything.

How often should my theophylline level be checked?

Theophylline, which is a very useful bronchodilator, can be measured via a blood test in order to determine a proper level in your system. It should initially be checked 5 to 6 days after taking a *theophylline* medication such as *Theodur*, *Uniphyl*, etc. and every 6 months thereafter. It is good to check a theophylline level at mid dose. For example, if you take it every 12 hours, the level should be checked 5 to 6 hours after taking your *theophylline* medication.

I have emphysema. Why can't I gain weight?

No one knows exactly why a person loses weight or can't gain it back. It is unsure whether it is a metabolic problem, nerves or simply the work of breathing harder. Weight loss is one symptom of emphysema; but, your physician should determine if sudden weight loss is due to some other disease.

Why doesn't my doctor explain what is wrong with me?

Perhaps your doctor feels you understand your condition; so, if you don't ask directly, he/she won't know how you feel. Most doctors are more than willing to help you provided you do not over abuse their time such as phone calling everyday. If you are courteous with your doctor, you should expect the same respect.

What is your opinion of room humidifiers?

Room humidifiers are a potential source of infection if not used and/or cleaned properly. Fungi and bacteria can easily grow in most areas which in turn can be inhaled into your lungs. In American Review of Respiratory Disease, research has found no proof that humidifiers really work. Drinking enough fluids is a better way for adequate hydration of the respiratory system. If you feel you are still too dry, a normal saline nasal lavage and/or gargling is much safer.

My doctor has ordered pulmonary function studies. What are they and can pulmonary functions ever be improved?

Pulmonary function studies give your doctor a quan-

titative idea of your lung volumes, information as to whether there is obstruction of air flow or underlying emphysema. It is really essential for your doctor to have a baseline study for follow up study in the future.

In addition, lung studies can help determine if a bronchodilator is effective or not. Pulmonary functions would be measured, a bronchodilator would then be given and pulmonary functions would again be measured to see how effective the bronchodilator was.

Pulmonary function studies can be improved especially if the patient uses proper bronchodilators, abstains from smoking, has an adequate diet, rests well and participates in an exercise program.

What is a bronchoscopy?

A bronchoscopy is a direct look into the bronchial tubes. The patient is only given a mild sedative before this procedure which may even be performed in some doctor's offices and usually takes no longer than 10 minutes. A flexible tube, which is gently guided into the airways, allows your doctor to directly check what is going on in your airways. He can clean out excess mucus, obtain a biopsy (a tissue sample from a problem area) and/or diagnose certain lung diseases. A bronchoscopy, however, is not used to diagnose chronic bronchitis or emphysema and is not a necessary procedure for everyone with lung disease.

How often do I need a chest X-ray?

Your physician will take a base line X-ray and may then do a follow up every one to two years. Additional X-rays may be ordered during severe infection or hospitalization.

Am I entitled to receive handicapped parking privileges?

Yes, you are entitled to this privilege if your pulmonary function studies are compromised making it difficult for you to walk or travel distances. You can pick up a form at the license tag bureau, have your physician sign the form and mail the form with a check for five dollars back to the license tag bureau. You will shortly receive a small handicapped tag for your license plate and a card which you should always carry with you either in your wallet or purse.

Why do I hear my heart beating in my head?

There is a transfer of sound along the arteries, especially the temple artery in the front of the ear. This sound may be accentuated if you're taking bronchodilators because most bronchodilators will increase the contraction of the heart. It is normal, not abnormal; so, do not be concerned.

I enjoy drinking milk, but I've heard that people with a respiratory condition shouldn't drink it. Why?

Unless you have been tested showing you are allergic to milk or dairy products, milk is a good source of nutrition. You may even take your medications with milk except *tetracyclines*. There are certain chemicals in the milk which bind with these antibiotics not allowing as much of the medicine to be absorbed.

How can I overcome chronic fatigue?

Unless you have been diagnosed with something that specifically causes chronic fatigue as in certain types of

anemia, the best way to overcome chronic fatigue is to get involved in an exercise program, get adequate rest, eat properly and follow the guidelines in this manual.

Exercise will cause some shortness of breath; however, you can gradually build up your endurance. You may have been sitting too many years. When you go to bed, you are only mentally tired - not physically tired. If you are physically tired from exercise, you will sleep better at night helping to overcome fatigue in the daytime. As expressed previously in this manual, check with your doctor before you begin an exercise program because there could be underlying conditions which may cause fatigue.

And finally, worry, anxiety, fear and/or boredom can cause fatigue. It may be difficult to break the cycle on your own. Ask your spouse or a friend to take part in your new routine for it will be beneficial for everyone.

How long will I live? How well will I live?

With new technology, medications and rehabilitation programs, the life span of people with lung disease has dramatically increased as well as their quality of life. It is extremely important for a person to seek immediate attention from a physician if he/she feels they have a lung problem. Too many people wait too long for proper medical attention.