

# Nutrition support in COPD

This leaflet aims to provide advice to help individuals with COPD who are having difficulty eating, feel full quickly, have a poor appetite, may be losing weight, feel weak and lack energy.

## Key principles for caring for yourself with COPD

- **Eat a varied diet and try to keep within a healthy weight range** - eating a balanced and varied diet can help prevent and fight infections, keep your body and lungs strong and make it easier to keep your weight in a healthy range. If you have lost weight don't worry if you can't gain it all back, try to follow some of the ideas and tips in this leaflet to help maintain your weight. If you continue to lose weight and feel you are struggling to eat enough and are finding you are lacking the strength to carry out everyday activities such as shopping, working and getting out and about, speak to your doctor, nurse or community pharmacist - they may refer you to a dietitian for specialist advice
- **Keep active** - remaining as active as possible helps to keep your lungs and the rest of your body strong. If you haven't been very active try to gradually increase the amount of activity you are doing, the amount you can do will depend on your previous fitness and whether you have been or are unwell. Gentle activities such as walking, moving around the home, climbing the stairs, can all help. If your appetite is very poor and your weight is low, you may need high energy and protein snacks throughout the day to provide the fuel your body needs to move and stay as strong as possible. Ask your health care provider (doctor, nurse, physiotherapist, dietitian or pulmonary rehabilitation team) for advice and further information on what's right for you and any local activity programmes that could help you move more, get started and keep you motivated



- **Control your breathing** - speak to your respiratory physiotherapist or nurse about breathing techniques, breathing exercises and positions that might help you - further information can be found at [www.acprc.org.uk/Data/Publication\\_Downloads/GL-05ACBT.pdf](http://www.acprc.org.uk/Data/Publication_Downloads/GL-05ACBT.pdf)
- **Take care of yourself** - make sure you are getting enough rest and sleep and consider your emotional wellbeing too - living with a long-term condition and being unwell, can make you prone to anxiety and depression. If you are concerned, talk to your health care professional about managing the anxiety you might be feeling and whether counselling or medications may be of help
- **If you smoke, try to give up** - this a fantastic step to take to improve your health. Your 'stop smoking journey' will not only improve your lung health and breathing but will also improve taste and sense of smell making food more enjoyable which is particularly important when appetite is poor. Discuss with your healthcare professional what smoking cessation services are available to you or ask them to point you to the right professional support and appropriate medication to succeed
- **Monitor your progress** - a self-management plan that you have agreed with your healthcare professional can help you manage your COPD and help with your condition, symptoms, medication and flare ups. You can check to see if you are losing too much weight by using the self-screening tool at [www.malnutritionselfscreening.org](http://www.malnutritionselfscreening.org)

## Monitor your weight monthly

- Weigh yourself regularly, at least weekly if not monthly and record it so you can spot trends in weight including unplanned weight loss. If you can't weigh yourself at home, ask to have your weight checked when you visit your GP surgery or clinic



- If you are unable to weigh yourself regularly, be aware of signs of your weight decreasing, for example clothes, your watch strap or jewellery becoming looser
- If you continue to lose weight or struggle to eat enough during periods of illness, seek advice from your doctor or nurse
- It is important to mention to your healthcare team if you have lost weight without meaning to, even if you are overweight



## Tips for a Balanced Diet

The leaflet 'Improving your Nutrition in COPD' contains information on the food groups that are important for you to include - [www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/library/yellow.pdf](http://www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/library/yellow.pdf)

### Tips for Making the Most of Your Food and Drinks

- Choose normal fat or high energy options of foods, e.g. whole milk, in place of 'low fat' or 'diet' versions
- Whilst fats and sugars are usually recommended in moderation, they can help you gain weight or avoid losing more weight when appetite is poor. Include fats and oils and sweet treats in your diet
- Examples of high energy snacks include a piece of cheese, a small handful of nuts, a slice of cake/teacake, a slice of toast with jam/peanut butter, a bar of chocolate, a pot of whole milk yogurt/fromage frais/mousse
- Try adding grated or cream cheese to mashed potato, soups, sauces, scrambled eggs, baked beans
- Add cream to sauces, scrambled eggs, soups, curries, mashed potatoes, desserts and porridge
- Use mayonnaise, salad cream or dressing in sandwiches and on salads
- Drizzle olive oil or add a knob of butter or margarine or ghee to vegetables, potatoes, scrambled eggs and bread
- Fortify your usual milk: mix 2-4 tablespoons of milk powder with a drop of milk to make a paste, beat or whisk into one pint of milk, then use this fortified milk in drinks, with cereals, to make custard
- Add honey, syrup and jams to porridge, milky puddings, on bread, toast or tea cakes
- Top up your intake between meals by taking a nourishing drink e.g. smoothies, soups, fruit juice, milkshakes or hot chocolate made with milk or dairy alternatives
- Keep a supply of 'ready meals' in the freezer and convenience foods with a good shelf life in the cupboard, e.g. long-life milk, savoury snacks, biscuits, rice puddings, cans of corned beef or tuna fish, baked beans, soups, ready to eat puddings and custard
- Powdered nutritional supplements or nourishing drinks are available from most supermarkets and pharmacies and can be used in between meals (ask your pharmacist or healthcare team for further information)
- Avoid filling up on drinks before or during your meal as this may affect how much you can eat if you need to drink at a mealtime
- Eat more of the foods that you enjoy at the times of day when you feel more like eating

#### **If you feel too tired to shop for, prepare or cook meals:**

- Ask family, friends or your carer for help with cooking, shopping or ordering food for home delivery
- Make a casserole or meal in a pot or use a slow cooker to prepare meals at a time of day when your energy levels are at their highest and make enough so you can freeze some portions for a meal on another day
- Ask to be assessed for a package of care (contact your local social services department)
- Buy pre-prepared meals, use meals on wheels services or home delivery services
- Arrange to eat with a friend or family member or attend a local lunch club as having company at mealtimes can help with the enjoyment of eating



## Tips for Eating when you are Short of Breath

You may find it more difficult to swallow and eat enough if you are very short of breath

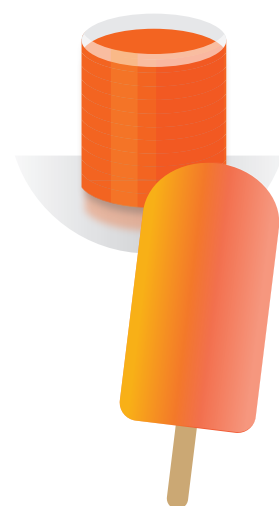
- It may be easier to eat softer, moist foods at these times, e.g. casseroles, curries, sauces, gravy, milky puddings, fruit smoothies, ice cream
- Aim to eat something 6 times per day, even if it is smaller meals and nutritious drinks or snacks between meals
- Choose softer, moist foods that are easier to chew and swallow
- Take your time during eating



## Tips for Coping with a Dry Mouth

Dry mouth can be caused by using oxygen, nebulisers or inhalers. It can make it difficult to chew and swallow foods, and sometimes it can lead to taste changes.

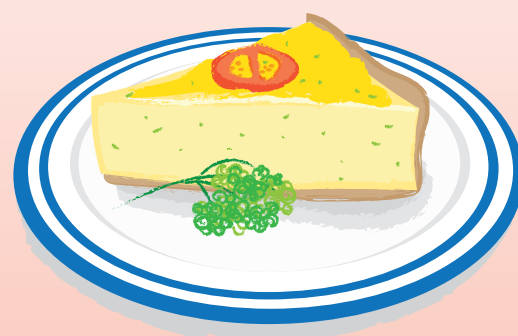
- Choose softer or moist foods, e.g. minced beef in shepherd's pie rather than pieces of dry meat
- Suck sugar-free fruit sweets, ice lollies made with fruit juice or squash, or chew sugar-free gum
- Pastilles or saliva sprays are available from your pharmacist or on prescription if the problem continues
- If you are finding it difficult to swallow, are frequently coughing during meals or your voice becomes gargly ask your doctor or nurse to refer you to a speech and language therapist who will be able to advise you
- Always make sure you keep your mouth clean and moist to avoid infections. Ask your dentist for advice if needed



## Tips for Coping with Taste Changes

If your taste changes you may lose your appetite and may not feel like eating your usual foods.

- After using a steroid inhaler rinse your mouth and gargle with water to prevent oral thrush
- Look after your mouth: regularly clean your teeth/dentures, use water and floss
- Focus on the foods you enjoy but don't be afraid to try new foods
- Try sharp or spicy or sugary foods, as they have a stronger taste
- Experiment with herbs, spices, pepper, chutneys and pickles in cooking
- If you struggle with the strong taste of hot foods, try cold foods
- Focus on the foods you enjoy but don't be afraid to try new foods
- If you go off a particular food, try it again regularly as your tastes may continue to change



## Oral Nutritional Supplements (Nutrition Drinks)

If you are struggling to eat enough, you may be given an oral nutritional supplement to try. National guidance recommends the use of these if you have COPD and a low body mass index (BMI of less than 20 kg/m<sup>2</sup>). Your GP or Dietitian may recommend the oral nutritional supplements are supplied on a prescription for you for weeks or months or longer depending on how well you can eat and drink ordinary foods

If you have been advised to take oral nutritional supplements:

- Your GP, Pharmacist, Nurse or Dietitian should tell you how many to take each day
- There are a range of types and flavours available (e.g. ready-made drinks, powders to be made up with fresh milk, savoury, puddings, milk, juice or yogurt styles). Discuss your preferences with your GP, Pharmacist, Nurse or Dietitian and find one you enjoy taking
- Oral nutritional supplements can provide extra energy, protein, vitamins and minerals and are usually recommended in addition to your normal diet. They are not intended to replace food, drinks or meals unless your healthcare professionals say otherwise
- Some contain more of certain nutrients, which may be helpful for some people with COPD (e.g. extra protein)
- Some are available in a smaller or low volume (e.g. 125ml bottle). The low volume product may be easier to manage if you are breathless, have a poor appetite or struggle to eat or drink large amounts
- If you are taking part in a pulmonary rehabilitation programme, ask the team whether you need extra energy in your diet, or oral nutritional supplements, to improve your nutrition and avoid losing weight or help you regain weight you may have lost
- If you are prescribed oral nutritional supplements, your progress and the continued benefit in using them should be monitored. You may not need the oral nutritional supplements all of the time but may be encouraged to take them on days when your appetite is particularly poor, after a set back with your disease, or when your appetite is affected by another illness



More advice on oral nutritional supplements can be found in the free leaflet 'Nutrition Drinks – Advice for patients and carers' (available from [www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/library/pleaflet\\_red.pdf](http://www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/library/pleaflet_red.pdf))

For more information about living with COPD visit

[www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/conditions/copd-chronic-obstructive-pulmonary-disease](http://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/conditions/copd-chronic-obstructive-pulmonary-disease)

or call the Asthma + Lung UK helpline on **0300 222 5800**