

# A Guide to Eating Well with

# Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

## Introduction

Good nutrition is an important part of your COPD management and can have lots of benefits, including:

- Reducing your chance of getting an infection
- Helping you to recover more quickly from a period of illness
- Helping to improve your lung function
- Helping to strengthen other muscles
- Improving your energy levels

Making sure that you maintain a healthy weight can also help you to manage your COPD.

## What is a balanced diet?

It is important to eat a variety of foods to get all the nutrients needed for good health. Include some food from each of the following food groups every day:

- Starchy foods such as bread, cereals, rice and potatoes
- Fruit and vegetables – aim for 5 portions a day (fresh, tinned, frozen, dried and juice all count)
- Milk and dairy foods – choose low fat versions if you are trying to lose weight
- Meat, fish, eggs, beans and lentils – grill or oven bake rather than fry for a healthier choice

- Foods high in fat and sugar (e.g. sweets, cakes, crisps, sugary drinks) – most should use these sparingly but If you have a small appetite, it may be useful to include some of these foods.
- Go for foods lower in saturated fat– choose foods with healthier fats like olive or sunflower oils, to help keep your heart healthy

## “I feel tired all the time and can’t be bothered to prepare meals”

- Save your energy, rest before and after meals
- Try ready-meals/convenience foods – you can add extra vegetables or salad if you wish
- Use the microwave
- Try to get some help with food preparation from family or friends
- Consider having Meals-on-Wheels or other pre-prepared meals
- Make the most of days when you feel less tired and cook and freeze extra portions of your favourite meals to have on other days
- Eat in a relaxed atmosphere

## **“My mouth feels dry and uncomfortable”**

- Choose moist foods and add gravy and other sauces to your meals
- Try sucking on mints or boiled sweets between meals to help your mouth feel fresher
- Sip on water, juice or other cold drinks
- Sucking on ice cubes or lolly ices between meals may help
- Avoid very salty foods which can make you feel more thirsty

## **Help with symptoms**

Do you feel short of breath and get tired easily? Does your mouth feel dry after using oxygen? Have you lost your appetite? Below are some ideas to help manage these symptoms and to increase your intake:

### **“I find that I get short of breath easily, especially at meal times which puts me off my food”**

- If you smoke, try to stop. Speak to your nurse or GP if you would like help with this
- Sit up straight when eating to open your lungs
- If you take any medications that help your breathing, use these about an hour before eating. Check with your pharmacist if you are unsure
- Eating six small meals or snacks throughout the day is more manageable than three bigger meals

## **Aim for a healthy weight**

- Aiming to achieve a healthy weight is an important part of managing your COPD and can help to control some of the symptoms of your condition

- You may find that you gain weight due to being less active than you used to be. Carrying extra weight can make it harder to breathe
- Some people may find they lose weight without meaning to, due to breathlessness and a lack of energy, making it more difficult to eat
- Being underweight can increase your chance of getting an infection and may make you feel more tired

## **Helpful hints for weight control**

If you feel that you would like to lose some weight, try some of the following suggestions:

- Aim for slow, steady weight loss – no more than 1–2 lbs per week
- Set yourself realistic goals
- Compare food labels and choose lower fat and lower calorie products
- Avoid buying foods that might ‘tempt’ you
- Fill up on vegetables at mealtimes
- Eat breakfast and develop a regular eating routine, try not to skip meals
- Fruit makes a nutritious, low fat snack
- Increase your exercise if you can – tasks like light house-work and gardening all count towards physical activity.

Check with your GP or physiotherapist before doing any new exercise

## **Advice for a small appetite**

If you have a poor appetite or have lost weight without meaning to, especially if you are underweight, it is a good idea to have a nourishing diet.

You could try some of the suggestions below to make some simple changes:

## Nourishing drinks

Some drinks like tea, coffee or squash may make you feel full but have little nutritional value. Switching to more nourishing drinks is an easy way to add extra calories. Some ideas include:

- Full cream milk
- Ovaltine/ Horlicks/ supermarket brand of malt drink
- Hot chocolate
- Milkshakes – homemade or shop bought
- Add sugar/ evaporated milk/ milk powder or cream to drinks
- Add dried skimmed milk powder to whole milk to help increase the calories and protein content. Simply add 4 tablespoons into 1 pint of milk which then can be drank on its own, used to make other nourishing drinks or to add into meals and puddings e.g. mashed potato or with cereal.

## Poor appetite

Breathlessness, some medications and tiredness can all reduce your appetite; try some of the following to help with this:

- Eat 'little and often' – include snacks e.g. cheese or peanut butter and crackers, crumpets, full fat yoghurt or rice pudding pots
- Don't have too much to drink with meals to avoid filling yourself up at mealtimes
- Add grated cheese, fat spreads or cream to meals
- Eat whatever you fancy and make the most of times when you feel hungry

If you are struggling to maintain a healthy weight then it is advisable to go to your GP.