

Nutrition in COPD

COPD is the leading cause of disability among Americans. A person's nutritional status can influence the degree of severity of COPD, and COPD can create circumstances that make consuming an adequate diet difficult.

General Body types associated with COPD

Overweight-peripheral edema is common. (Water retention in feet and legs) poor skin tone resulting from a lack of oxygen distributed to the body tissues. Underweight-prone to weight loss, poor appetite common and muscle wasting apparent. Chest, arms and legs look bony.

Maintaining or achieving a desirable body weight is essential. Being overweight increases the workload on your heart and lungs to supply oxygen to all areas of the body.

Secondly, excess fat in the abdominal area crowds the diaphragm, making it difficult to fully expand the lungs. By losing weight through proper diet and exercise, the body's muscle mass is increased. This makes breathing easier and the person will feel healthier and more energetic.

In the other hand, being underweight is a problem as well. Weight loss is a consequence of a combination of increased calorie needs inadequate diet. As a result of a poor diet, the body's muscle mass, including the respiratory muscles, becomes depleted, making breathing more difficult. The increased work of breathing creates a higher calorie need and a cycle of weight loss and muscle wasting is perpetuated.

The impact of nutrition on immunity

A diet deficient in calories, protein and vitamins and minerals has a negative effect on immune function. The body's cells that fight infection are made of proteins. Poor diet makes it difficult for the body to build new immune factors to fight infection and to repair damaged tissues. decreased appetite and increased caloric needs may then start another debilitating cycle. For this reason and the ones above, the COPD patient must achieve a balance of good nutrition and exercise to stay as healthy as possible.

Nutritional needs

- Fluid-hydrating fluids mean caffeine free products. Fluid keeps mucus thin and keeps body hydrated. Also, oxygen use can be drying to the mucus membranes. Some medications can add to this drying effect.
- Protein- for repairing and building cells. The amount you need depends on your nutritional status and should be determined by a dietician during your rehab program
- Calcium-especially important for women and for individuals who are on steroid medications. Calcium strengthens bones and helps regulate blood pressure. Calcium is mostly obtained from dairy products and supplements.

- Adequate calories- important even if you are trying to lose weight. See a dietician for that assessment.
- Potassium-potassium need and levels should be determined by lab tests and discussed with your physician. Important for blood pressure control, muscle contraction and nerve impulse transmission. Potassium is susceptible to depletion as a result of certain diuretic medications. It is found in fruits, vegetables, dairy and meats.
- Caffeine- limit beverages containing caffeine. It causes the body to lose water and it increases the diuretic effect of some medications such as Theophylline.

Tips to eating well

- Eat foods from each of the basic food groups: fruits and vegetables, dairy products, cereal and grains and proteins.
- Limit your salt intake. Too much sodium can cause you to retain fluids that may interfere with breathing.
- Limit your intake of caffeinated drinks. Caffeine may interfere with some of your medications and also make you feel nervous.
- Avoid foods that produce gas and make you feel bloated. The best process to use in eliminating foods from your diet is trial and error.
- Try to eat your main meal early. This way, you will have more energy to carry yourself through the day.
- Choose foods that are easy to prepare. Buy pre-washed, pre-cut fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid foods that supply little or NO nutritional value. Examples: coffee, tea, soda.
- try eating six small meals a day instead of three large ones.
- If preparing foods requires too much energy, check local agencies that provide meals on wheels. Rest before eating your meal.
- Eat the bigger meal earlier in the day
- Keep fruit juice and water readily available in the refrigerator.