



Keep active

Activity, exercise and
pulmonary rehabilitation

blf.org.uk/keep-active



Delivered by the Manchester
Integrated Lungs Service

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If you have a lung condition, being active can help to improve your quality of life and help you manage your condition.

There are many different ways to be active. You can increase everyday activities like walking or gardening, join an exercise class, take part in a pulmonary rehabilitation course, or take up sports and activities like yoga, dancing and tai chi.

This booklet explains the benefits of being active and gives practical advice on how to get started. It also gives an overview of what to expect on a pulmonary rehabilitation course.

We feature real life stories in this booklet. Some names have been changed and some pictures are posed by models. The information in this booklet has been reviewed by independent experts. We have made every effort to ensure that the information provided is correct. The British Lung Foundation cannot accept liability for any errors or omissions, and policy, practice or medical research may change. If you are concerned about your health, you should consult a doctor.

Why is being active important for me?

We're often told that being active is good for us. But if you have a lung condition, you might wonder if it's right for you. The fear of getting out of breath may put you off doing any activity that makes you more breathless.

In fact, being active can actually help to improve your breathing and quality of life. Many people find it helps more than inhaled drugs. If you increase your fitness and strengthen your muscles, you'll get less out of breath doing everyday activities like going shopping, doing housework or climbing the stairs. You may even re-discover activities you thought you could no longer do.

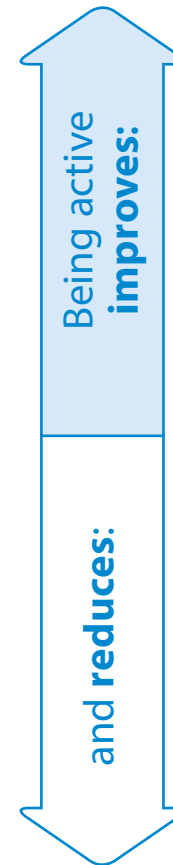
You might be nervous about becoming active, especially if you haven't been active for a while. But even a little physical activity is better than none at all. And you may feel more in control because you're doing something positive for yourself.

“Before I was diagnosed I didn't exercise as such, but once I realised the benefits that physical activity can have on my condition, my outlook completely changed. Through activity I have learnt to live with my condition.”

Hazel

How can I benefit from being active?

Being active improves your fitness, makes you stronger and helps you manage health conditions and stay out of hospital. Physical activity helps you take back control, be more independent and can help you live well for longer.



- ▀ the strength of your breathing muscles, heart and circulation
- ▀ the strength of your arm and leg muscles
- ▀ the strength of your bones
- ▀ your ability to resist infections
- ▀ your flexibility and joint mobility
- ▀ your energy levels
- ▀ your wellbeing and confidence
- ▾ anxiety or depression
- ▾ stress levels and blood pressure
- ▾ risk of falling (by improving your balance)
- ▾ the risk of developing other health problems such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, osteoarthritis, dementia and some cancers

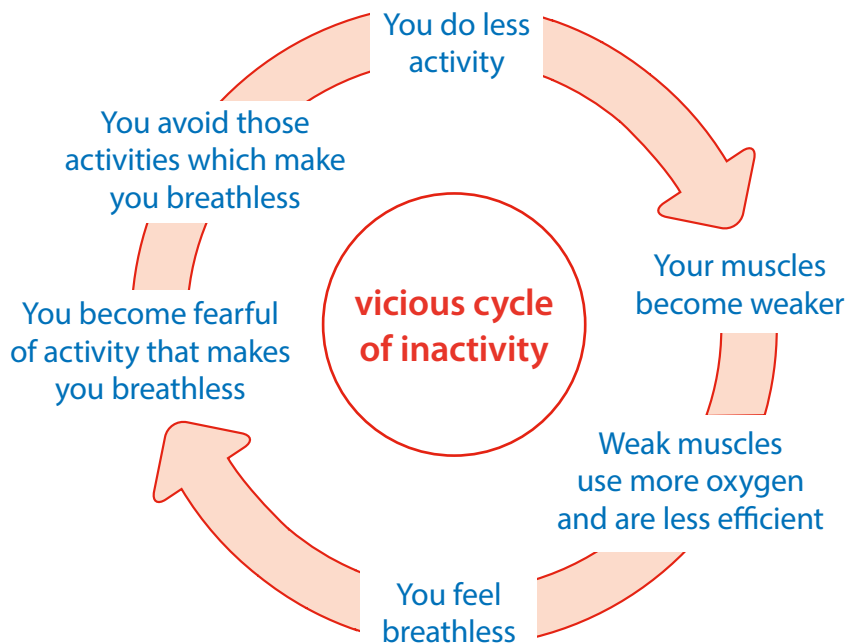
“I feel better in my body and mind... Exercise has saved my life!”

Roy

How will being active affect my breathing?

Many people find it surprising, but **getting breathless when you're active is good for you!**

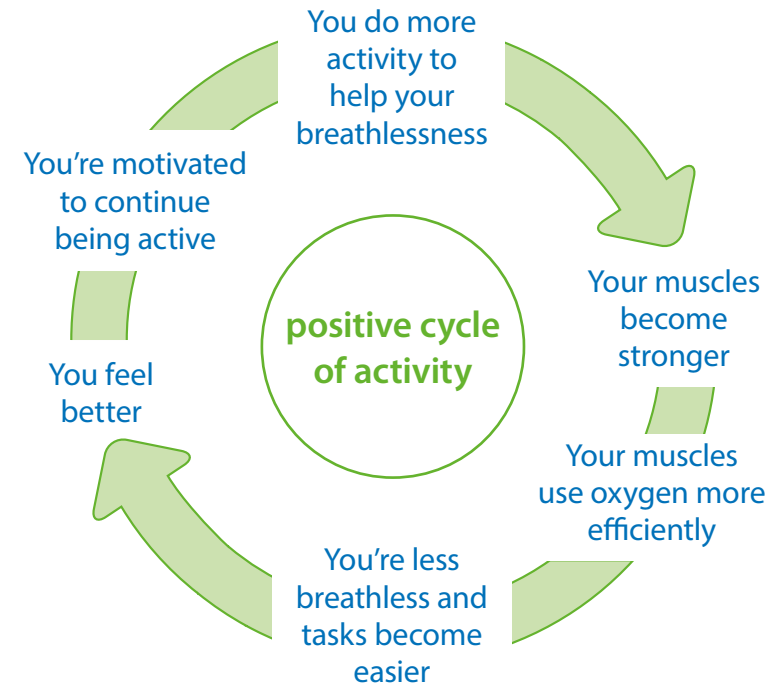
Being active strengthens your muscles and increases your fitness. If you avoid activities that make you breathless, your muscles become weaker. Weaker muscles need more oxygen to work. Over time you feel more and more breathless. This is called the **vicious cycle of inactivity**.



“Being breathless is normal. The important thing is to pace yourself and to be able to understand and identify your limits.”

Ron

The good news is that you can break this vicious cycle of inactivity. By becoming more active you can make your muscles stronger, including your breathing muscles. This will help you feel less out of breath when you do everyday tasks.



How can I cope with getting breathless?

It's normal to get breathless when you're active, but if you have a lung condition, you may feel anxious about it. If you panic, it can make you feel even more breathless. The key is to stay calm and learn ways to manage your breathlessness.

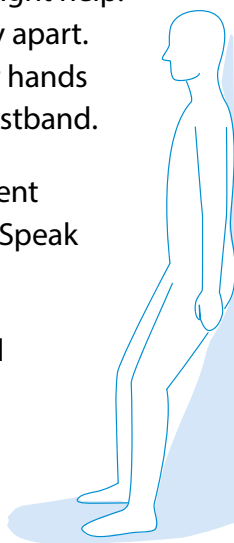
Useful breathing techniques

- **Blow as you go:** Use this when doing an action that takes a lot of effort, like standing up or lifting. Breathe in before the action, then breathe out while you're making the big effort.
- **Pursed-lips breathing:** Breathe out with your lips pursed as if you were whistling. This helps you to empty the air from your lungs.
- **Paced breathing:** Pace your breathing so it's in time with your steps. For example, take two steps for every breath in and three steps for every breath out. Find the pace that works for you.

If you start to feel too out of breath, this position might help. Stand 30cm away from a wall with your feet slightly apart. Lean back or sideways against the wall and let your hands hang by your sides, or rest your thumbs in your waistband.

Depending on your lung condition, there are different breathing techniques and positions you could use. Speak to a physiotherapist to find out what's best for you.

Read more about breathing techniques and helpful positions for COPD and pulmonary fibrosis at blf.org.uk/support. The Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care also has leaflets at www.acprc.org.uk/publications



How active should I aim to be?

The UK government recommends how active we should be. If you're not very active at the moment, the recommendations below might seem overwhelming. Think about how you could do a little every day. Even 10 minutes can have a positive impact. Over time, your fitness will increase and you'll be able to do more.

Sit less

This is one of the biggest changes you can make. Try to break up long periods of sitting and increase the number of steps you take every day. Research suggests that just 1,000 more steps a day can make a difference. Some people find it useful to aim for a target – for example 10,000 steps a day. Track your daily steps using a smartphone or pedometer and try to gradually increase this number.

Aerobic activity

Every week, try to do at least 150 minutes of activities like **brisk walking, dancing, gardening** and **housework** – about 20 minutes a day. These aerobic activities work your heart and lungs. Your body warms up, your heart beats faster and your breathing is quicker and deeper than normal. Aim to get moderately out of breath – use the talk test on page 10 to check you're working at the right level.

Strengthening activity

Aim to do activities that improve your muscle strength at least twice a week. You can fit this into your daily life, for example by **carrying shopping bags**. You could also do **yoga** or **use weights** in a gym.

Improving coordination and balance

If you're older or at risk of falling, include some activities that improve coordination and balance at least one day a week. For example **dance, tai chi** and **bowls**.

Working at the right level for me

When you're active, you want to get moderately out of breath, but not too much. Check you're exerting yourself the right amount using **the talk test**. Say out loud:

"This activity is going to do me good!"

- If you can say the sentence with two or three stops for breath, you're working at a moderate intensity. This is your aim.
- If you can say the whole sentence without stopping, you can increase the intensity.
- If you can't speak, or can't say more than one word at a time, you may want to slow down.



If you're worried about figuring out the right level for you, speak to your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist. If they recommend that physical activity isn't suitable for you at the moment, ask about other things that might help improve your quality of life.

How can I keep safe when I'm active?

It's important to look after yourself while you're being active.

- Start slowly and gradually build up
- Warm up before and cool down after your exercise
- If you use an inhaler, carry it while you exercise, use it when you need to
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing and supportive non-slip shoes
- Drink plenty of water so you don't get dehydrated
- Wait for at least an hour after eating before starting to exercise
- Be active at a level that's right for you – use the talk test on the previous page to check
- **STOP if you get any sudden symptoms, including: chest pain or tightness, feeling dizzy, nauseous, clammy or cold, feeling increasingly wheezy, or getting sore joints or muscle weakness. Seek advice from a health care professional.**

What activities could I do?

There's no single activity that's best for everyone.

Choose activities you enjoy and think about what's the right level for you. For more information about useful organisations, visit [blf.org.uk/keep-active/support](https://www.blf.org.uk/keep-active/support)

Activities in daily life

There are many ways to be more active in day to day life.

For example walking up stairs, doing housework, gardening, walking your dog, or playing with your children or grandchildren.

Break up periods of sitting by walking around when you're on the phone or during TV advertising breaks. Try getting off the bus one stop early, or walking to the shops if you usually go by car. If walking there and back seems too much, walk there and get the bus back.

Structured activities

There are lots of structured activities which can help you increase your activity levels:

- **being active at home**
- **community activity**
- **specialist exercise classes**
- **pulmonary rehabilitation (PR)**

If you're worried about starting a new activity, check with your health care professional that it's safe for you. Tell the organisers about your condition so they can support you.

Being active at home

Being active at home allows you to work at your own pace.

- **BLF resources:** Our exercise DVD and handbook support you to do simple exercise at home. Order at [blf.org.uk/publications](https://www.blf.org.uk/publications) or call our helpline on **03000 030 555**.
- **Activity DVDs, smartphone apps and online videos:** These are a great way to try out different activities such as yoga, tai-chi, keep fit and dancing. Try different activities online or try a DVD or app to see if you like something. Then choose something you enjoy.
- **Couch to 5K:** If you'd like to get out of the house, try this podcast from the NHS. It helps you gradually increase your activity using a walking or jogging programme. www.nhs.uk/Livewell/c25k

Community activity

You might be surprised at the number of activities where you live that are suitable for someone with a lung condition:

- **Walking:** Health walk programmes across the UK offer free, short, local group walks. Your health care professional may know about suitable walking groups in your area.
- **Local facilities:** Local authorities, gyms, community halls and schools offer chances to use their facilities and try out activities like swimming, yoga, tai chi, dance, bowls and golf.
- **Walking sports:** Walking sports are less strenuous than traditional versions. Aimed at people over 55 or those with a long-term condition, they're a social and flexible way to take part in sport. You could try walking football, netball, cricket, hockey and more.

- **Singing:** Singing can help breathing and wellbeing. It exercises breathing muscles and builds stamina through vocal exercises and songs. Find your nearest group at blf.org.uk/singing

Join your local **Breathe Easy support group!** Groups offer friendship and support, and some also arrange exercise and singing classes. Find your nearest group at blf.org.uk/breathe-easy

Specialist exercise classes

If you feel you need more support, physical activity specialists can help. Some have respiratory knowledge and run classes like **BLF Active**. Others are trained to support people with long-term conditions and work on **exercise referral schemes**.

BLF Active

BLF Active helps people with lung conditions access exercise tailored for them. It gives people finishing pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) a way to continue exercising safely, and provides safe exercise classes for people who can't get PR. To find your closest group, call our helpline on **03000 030 555** or visit blf.org.uk/support-in-your-area

“Instead of antibiotics every seven to eight weeks, I have gone 18 months without needing any since starting BLF Active exercise”

Mary

Exercise referral schemes

These schemes allow GPs and other health care professionals to refer patients to specialist activity instructors. You'll get close supervision from a specialist instructor either one-to-one or in a group. Ask your health care professional about exercise referral schemes in your area.

Natalie was diagnosed with sarcoidosis when she was 30.

“ I was relieved to have a reason to explain the symptoms that had taken me to A&E. But I knew little about my condition or what it meant for me.

I remember it took me an hour to get out of bed one morning before I was admitted to hospital. It was hard coming to terms with the fact that this condition would impact my life. I hit a real low. I was exhausted.

A turning point came when I was recommended to go to classes designed to get people with lung conditions into exercise. I felt nervous as I wasn't in a good place.

My doctor had just referred me to the psychiatrist. She thought I had depression.

I was shown breathing techniques and the staff were really good about making it your choice of how to be active.



“ I feel better than I have done in years ”

I've gone from darkness to light. It's helped me combat depression and brought back my ability to be active. And I'm now back at work, after having to quit my job because of my condition. ”

Pulmonary rehabilitation or PR

Pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) is made up of:

- a physical exercise programme, designed for people with lung conditions and tailored for you
- information on looking after your body and your lungs, and advice on managing your condition and your symptoms, including feeling short of breath

It's designed for people who are severely breathless. Your PR team will be made up of trained health care professionals such as physiotherapists, nurses and occupational therapists.

You'll be in a group of about 8-16 people. A course usually lasts six to eight weeks, with two sessions of about two hours each week. PR courses are held in local hospitals, community halls, leisure centres and health centres.

Completing a course of PR is a good way to learn how to exercise safely and at the right level for you. Most people enjoy the course. It builds confidence and it's great fun meeting others in a similar situation.

“ Pulmonary rehabilitation is the most beneficial treatment I have received... not only for the exercise provided but more importantly for the education given ”

Colin

How will PR help me?

PR can:

- improve your muscle strength so you can use the oxygen you breathe more efficiently
- help you cope better with feeling out of breath
- improve your fitness so you feel more confident to do things
- help you feel better mentally

PR helps you manage your condition and makes you feel better, but it's not a cure. You're unlikely to see a change in your lung function, so you may not see a difference in breathing test results. What it can do is help you make the most of the lung function that you have. There's evidence that it improves your ability to walk further, helps you feel less tired and breathless doing day-to-day activities and reduces your risk of ending up in hospital.

“ When I started the course, I could barely walk 500 metres before becoming too breathless to continue. By the end of six weeks, I could walk 1500 metres. It's not about getting better – it's about living better with my condition ”

John

“ Thank you for giving me my life back ”

Val

Who should go to PR?

PR is aimed at people with a lung condition whose ability to be active is affected by breathing difficulties.

Most people who go to PR have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), but people with other long-term lung conditions can also benefit, such as bronchiectasis and pulmonary fibrosis. It's recommended for people coming out of hospital after a COPD flare-up.

If you struggle with walking, have uncontrolled heart problems or have recently had a heart attack, PR might not be suitable for you at the moment.

You can do PR if you use oxygen

People who use oxygen to help manage their condition will be assessed to see if a portable oxygen cylinder is needed during the class. If you've been prescribed oxygen and told that your oxygen levels drop when you exercise, portable oxygen treatment may increase how much exercise you can do.

How do I get PR?

Your GP, practice nurse or respiratory team can refer you for PR. Ask them if PR is right for you and what's available in your area.

Some programmes will have waiting lists, so the sooner you act, the sooner you can start. If you're told you're not eligible for PR, you could try other ways of being active (see page 12).

“Once I started, it just got easier and easier!”

Bob was diagnosed with COPD in his 60s.



“When I first started feeling chesty, I was diagnosed with asthma. Whenever I felt worse I'd use my inhaler and my symptoms would steady off. But some years later I started to get really breathless and was re-diagnosed with COPD.

Within months my breathlessness forced me into early retirement. But then I wasn't getting any exercise and the breathlessness started to show even more. I couldn't take care of my allotment any more. That helped me make up my mind to do something about it.

That's when I discovered pulmonary rehabilitation. I felt so much better straight away! I realised how easy it was to get back into shape. And once I started, it just got easier and easier!

I go to the gym three times a week now, and spend ten minutes on a bike, on a rowing machine and on a stepper. In between, I lift weights.

Starting PR isn't easy – the initial push is really hard. But I'm so glad I took the plunge. ”

What happens on a PR course?

A typical PR course will always start with an assessment of your health and abilities. Your PR team will ask questions to understand you and your body, so they can help you get the best out of the course.

Physical exercise

At each session, you'll spend about half the time on physical exercise. This will be designed to provide the right level of activity for you. You'll get out of breath, but this is part of the therapy. You'll always be monitored and won't be asked to do more than you can do safely.

Information and discussion

For the rest of the time, you'll learn about topics such as:

- why exercise is so important for people with lung conditions
- how to use breathing techniques during physical activity or when you feel anxious
- how to manage anxiety and low mood
- how to use your inhalers and other medicines
- how to eat healthily
- what to do when you're unwell

For PR to really work you need to be committed, attend sessions regularly and follow the advice given by your team.

After you've completed your course, it's important to continue being active by using the techniques you've learned. Your PR team might refer you to a follow-up exercise programme – ask them if this is an option. Or try one of the other ways we've suggested to keep active.

Tips to get you motivated

So how can you get started? This section helps you think about your motivations for being more active and helps you plan how to begin. Why not share your plans with your family or friends so that they can support you?

Why do I want to get more active?

Think about the reasons you want to become more active. For example, 'I want to get back to doing things I used to enjoy' or 'I want to improve how I feel'.

What are your top three?

1

2

3

How might life be different if I become more active?

How might you feel? What activities might you be able to do that you can't do now? Compare this to what life will be like if you don't become more active.

What good things could happen if I become more active?

.....

.....

What would life be like if I don't become more active?

.....

.....

How can I become more active?

Think about what activities you enjoy or want to try:

I'd like to try...

Think about ways to reduce the amount of time you spend sitting:

I will try to sit less by...

Set your goals

Having a goal gives you something positive to work towards and helps you recognise your progress. Set yourself achievable goals:

- think about what you enjoy doing
- start at a level that's right for you
- build up gradually, at your own pace

My long-term goal

What would you like to achieve in the next few weeks or months?

How would you like to feel?

Example: *"At the moment I get the bus to the shops twice a week. By the end of next month, I will walk to the shops instead."*

Try writing your own goal:

.....

.....

My short-term goals

Short-term goals help you gradually build up your activity levels to help you achieve your goal.

Example: *"At my exercise class, I will do two more repetitions of my arm exercises this week."*

Try to make these goals as specific as possible and include:

- what you'll do
- when you'll do it,
- how long you'll do it for
- who you'll do it with

My first short-term goal

I will...

When will I do this?

.....

Where will I do this?

.....

Who will I do this with?

.....

.....

tip

Work towards your goal with another person – it can be easier to stay motivated when you have company.

Prepare yourself for things that might get in the way of success

What things might stop you achieving your short-term goal? It could be the weather, feeling unwell or other commitments. Think about how you can overcome them:

Things that could get in the way	To overcome this, I will...
Poor weather	...do my exercise DVD at home instead

If you don't achieve your goal, that's OK. Don't be disappointed with yourself – think about what you did achieve, no matter how small.

Take some time to think about why you didn't achieve your goal:

- Was it too difficult?
- Did you give yourself enough time?
- Did you get enough support?

Be kind to yourself and return to an easier stage of your activity plan or think about making changes to your goal to make it more achievable next time.

You might find it useful to keep an activity diary to help you set and review your goals. You can download our 12 week activity diary at blf.org.uk/keep-active/get-started

Make a commitment

Make a pledge to yourself, saying why you want to be more active.

I, (your name),

commit to becoming more active so that I can:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



tip You could cut out this commitment and place it somewhere visible, like on your fridge, so you're reminded of it every day. Share this commitment with your family or friends, so they can support you.

Help and support

For more information, call our friendly helpline team on **03000 030 555**. They can answer your questions and help you find PR services or exercise classes in your area. They can also tell you about organisations to help you be active, including walking groups, walking sports, and mobility and disability organisations.

You might want to connect with other people living with a lung condition to share your experiences. You could join our web community at blf.org.uk/web-community or get involved with your local Breathe Easy support group. Visit our website or call the helpline to find your nearest group.



Get help

Call our helpline on **03000 030 555**

We are here to help if you want:

- answers to your questions – whether it's about coping with symptoms, your rights or finding equipment
- clear and trustworthy information about breathing problems and living with a lung condition
- to get in touch with your local Breathe Easy support group

Our friendly team are here Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. Ringing never costs more than a local call. It's usually free, depending on your call package, even from a mobile.

Or visit blf.org.uk to find support information or to join our web community

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| › get support and information | blf.org.uk/support-for-you |
| › order our free leaflets | blf.org.uk/publications |
| › sign up to our newsletter | blf.org.uk/signup |
| › find your local Breathe Easy group | blf.org.uk/breathe-easy |
| › join our web community | blf.org.uk/web-community |

Help others like you

You can help us to fund more research to find cures and new treatments, and make sure everyone has the support they need. We're the only UK charity looking after the nation's lungs, and we rely on your donations. Visit blf.org.uk/donate or call **03000 030 555**.

At some point in our lives, one in five of us will have a lung disease. Millions more are at risk.

We're the only UK charity looking after the nation's lungs.

We offer hope, help and a voice.

Our research finds new ways to prevent, treat and cure lung disease.

Our support gives people who struggle to breathe the skills, knowledge and confidence to take control of their lives.

And together, we're campaigning for clean air and better services.

**One day, everyone will breathe clean air with healthy lungs.
Only your support can make that happen.**

Get in touch with us to find support near you.

Helpline: **03000 030 555** Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Ringling our helpline will cost the same as a local call.

helpline@blf.org.uk

blf.org.uk

Support available in Manchester

Contact your local respiratory team on 0161 720 4709

Opening Hours: 9.00am to 5.00pm, 7 days per week

To attend a pulmonary rehabilitation course near you, speak to your GP, practice nurse or respiratory team who will be able to refer you.

Search **Living with COPD Manchester** for more information.



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We value feedback on our information. To let us know your views, and for the most up to date version of this information and references, call the helpline or visit blf.org.uk

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