



Patient education: Pulmonary rehabilitation (The Basics)

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What is pulmonary rehabilitation?

This is the term used to describe a program that includes education, exercise, and healthy lifestyle changes. It is often part of the treatment plan for people with lung disease. ("Pulmonary" means related to the lungs.)

The goals of pulmonary rehabilitation are to:

- Help you understand your disease
- Make changes to improve your overall health
- Improve your quality of life

Most people who do a pulmonary rehabilitation find it very helpful.

Pulmonary rehabilitation is sometimes called "pulmonary rehab" for short.

Why do I need pulmonary rehabilitation?

Doctors often recommend pulmonary rehabilitation for people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or "COPD." When you have COPD, the airways (the branching tubes that carry air within the lungs) become narrow and damaged ([figure 1](#)). This makes you feel out of breath and tired.

Pulmonary rehabilitation is sometimes used for people with other lung diseases, too. For example, people with interstitial lung disease, pulmonary hypertension, asthma, lung cancer, or cystic fibrosis might find pulmonary rehabilitation helpful. It might also help a person recover from an infection that has damaged their lungs, such as COVID-19.

What does a pulmonary rehabilitation program involve?

You will likely work with several different experts, including doctors, respiratory therapists, and physical therapists. They will work with you to create a program that is specific to you and your needs. You might go to the hospital or doctor's office once or twice a week for visits, or you might be able to do exercises at home.

A program typically includes:

- **Exercises** – The goal of exercise is to help build up your endurance and strength. Endurance training involves improving your ability to do more physical activity without having trouble breathing. You might use a special machine, similar to an exercise bike. Your team will ask you questions about your breathing and energy level, and adjust your exercises based on this. They will also give you exercises to do using weights, which help improve your muscle strength.

You might also learn special breathing exercises that can help relieve your symptoms.

- **Education** – Pulmonary rehabilitation also involves learning about your disease. The goal is to make sure that you know how to care for yourself and how to avoid things that can make your breathing worse. This includes making sure that you understand how and when to take your medicines and when to use oxygen if you need it. It might also include talking about your plans for the future, and what kinds of treatments you might want if your lung disease becomes more severe.
- **Behavior changes** – There are lots of things you can do to improve your overall health, like quitting smoking, improving your diet, and getting enough physical activity. Making these changes can be challenging, and your health care team can help support you.

You will also learn ways to save energy when you do your usual activities. For example, it can help to plan ahead for things like showering, eating meals, and chores. The goal is to find ways to do these things without getting very tired and out of breath.

You might also have a chance to talk with other people who are living with similar breathing problems. Many people find this helpful.

Your team will work closely with you to see how your health improves. They will adjust your exercises as you gradually become able to do more. They will also make sure that you have the information and support you need to stay as healthy as possible. They can also help if you are struggling with depression or anxiety.

How long does pulmonary rehabilitation take?

A pulmonary rehabilitation program typically takes at least 8 weeks. But it might be shorter or longer.

After your program has ended, you can continue to use what you have learned to stay as healthy as possible over time.

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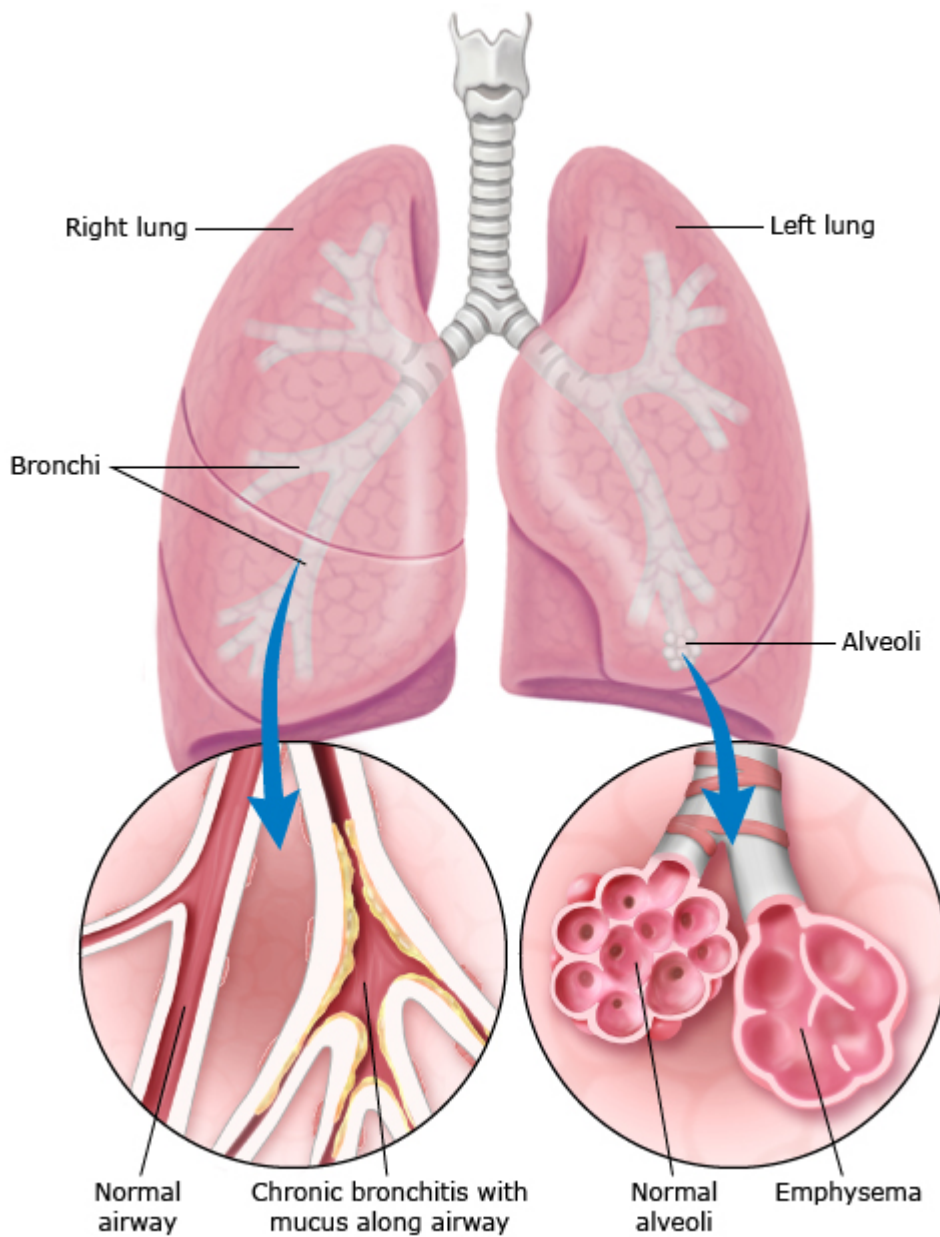
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GRAPHICS

Changes to the lungs in COPD



In COPD, the airways ("bronchi") of the lungs become narrow and can be clogged with mucus. The air sacs ("alveoli") that make up the lungs can also become damaged.

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