

## Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a lung disease characterized by chronic obstruction of lung airflow that interferes with normal breathing. Chronic bronchitis and emphysema are now included within the COPD diagnosis. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) indicates that damage has occurred to the delicate tissues of the lung: the alveoli or air sacs. The once numerous small, elastic-walled sacs have coalesced into larger floppier-walled areas, like a deflated balloon. A diminished surface area remains for the function of gas exchange.

Even mild exertion can bring on breathlessness or a coughing fit and exacerbate the condition. Reliever medications are often prescribed for COPD. You are advised to carry your reliever medication such as Ventolin, Bricanyl, Respigen, Salamol with you at all times and to use as necessary to control symptoms. However, while these medications may offer temporary relief, they can exacerbate your symptoms so should be used sparingly. If need for reliever medication persists you should seek medical advice.

**You are advised not to make any changes to prescription medication without consulting your doctor.**

### Conventional management of COPD

There is currently no cure for COPD and the prevailing prognosis is that the condition will gradually get worse over time. However, at the Buteyko Breathing Clinic we believe that with good management, a better quality of life is possible.

The first step in management of COPD is to minimise risk factors:

- stop smoking
- reduce occupational exposure

There is a need to review traditional management practices for COPD which may encourage deep or big volume breathing. This can and often does exacerbate symptoms.

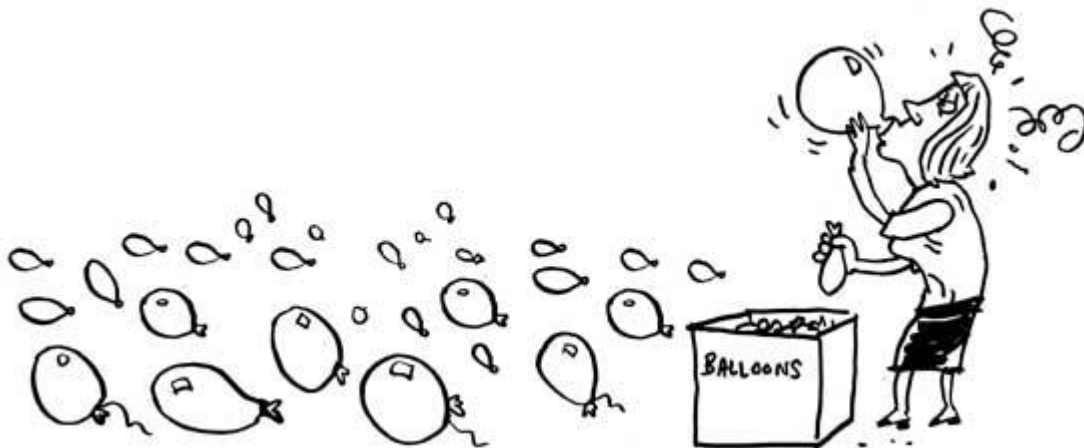
The Buteyko Breathing Clinic programme teaches exercises and lifestyle guidelines that help restore breathing volumes to more appropriate levels.

As breathing efficiency improves, symptoms can reduce and greater mobility may be possible.

## Managing the symptoms of COPD

Consider how you would feel after blowing up a batch of party balloons. We are often told that deep breathing is good for us and will deliver more oxygen to our body, yet breathing deeply to blow up a balloon leaves us feeling worse, not better! We experience symptoms indicative of lack of oxygen such as dizziness, breathlessness, light-headedness, etc.

Paradoxically, breathing in this way can reduce oxygen availability to brain and body tissues as explained in this [section on the science of breathing retraining on our website »](#)



At the Buteyko Breathing Clinic we can help you reduce the severity of your symptoms by teaching you breathing exercises and life-style guidelines that enable you to breathe more efficiently. Nasal breathing is encouraged at all times and the pace of everyday activities is adjusted to accommodate the breathing techniques learned. And more importantly, the techniques you learn can help increase body oxygen levels thereby improving your mobility and stamina. It is often quite a surprise for someone diagnosed with COPD to discover they can complete many daily tasks without getting breathless. Many of our clients had previously resigned themselves to slow irreversible deterioration.

## What can you do to get started?

*Slow down, slow down, slow down.*

Initially you will need to walk, eat and talk more slowly.

If you can breathe comfortably through your nose while seated then why not try it when you are moving around.

### **Try this exercise for improved mobility with less breathlessness.**

While sitting notice your breathing. Is it quiet, gentle, are you breathing through your nose? Now try to maintain this same breathing pattern as you get up from your chair. Keep your mouth closed and breathe through your nose. Now start moving but only at a pace that enables you to maintain comfortable nasal breathing. If you start to feel breathless then stop and allow your breathing to recover. Once your breathing has recovered continue again at a pace that doesn't bring on breathlessness. Stop to recover your breath as many times as you need. For example a trip from the house to the mail box might normally take 1 minute and leave you breathless. Doing it this way might take 5 minutes but hey, imagine if you could do it without gasping and wheezing for 10 minutes. And if you can, then that is less wear and tear on your lungs. Look after those lungs they are all you have!

This may seem frustrating at first but if you let comfortable nasal breathing guide your pace you may find in time that you can move at a slightly faster pace without getting breathless. This can take time so be patient.

Now try to incorporate these principles into everyday activities including all movement, exertion, lifting, walking, climbing stairs, housework, preparing meals, gardening, mowing the lawns, getting in and out of bed, getting in and out of chairs, the car, showering, talking, eating etc.

## Foods and drinks that make you breathless

Avoid foods and drinks that might bring on symptoms. These include those containing refined white sugar and flour. It is also a good idea to reduce dairy products. Caffeine and alcohol can also stimulate breathing and bring on symptoms.

## Supressing coughs, sighs, yawn

Try to supress coughs if you can. It is better to use gentle throat clearing to bring up stubborn mucous rather than deep coughing. If you have a coughing fit cup hands over mouth and nose and re-inhale the cough. Breathing gently through your nose into cupped hands can often help settle a cough.

## The next step

The tips in this guide are to help get you started on the path to healthy breathing and do not constitute all or part of a Buteyko breathing re-training programme. You should not make any changes to prescribed medication without first consulting your health provider. If you have any doubts about your condition consult one of our practitioners or your health provider.

**To find out how we can help or to book a private consultation or attend an upcoming course, contact us on:**

**09-360 6291 or [info@buteykobreathing.nz](mailto:info@buteykobreathing.nz)**

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