

Nutritional Care for COPD

This guide has been prepared for your use by registered dietitians. If you have questions or concerns, please call the nearest Aurora facility to contact a dietitian. Diet counseling is available to address your specific needs.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, also known as COPD, is a group of respiratory diseases, including emphysema and chronic bronchitis. With these conditions, it is difficult to get air in and out of the lungs.

Healthy eating habits, along with physical activity recommended by your doctor, will help keep your muscles strong and your heart and lungs well supplied with oxygen. Improving your eating habits will not cure COPD, but will help you enjoy life despite COPD.

Eating for good health

- Eat a variety of foods from all food groups to help keep your energy levels up and your immune system working at its best.
- Limit your salt intake to help control fluid retention and blood pressure.
- See For Your Well Being titled “Ways to Cut Down on Sodium in Your Diet.”
- Limit intake of high-sugar foods and beverages, such as regular soda, sweetened beverages and high-sugar desserts.
- Eat a diet rich in lean protein sources, such as lean meat, fish, poultry and low-fat dairy products.
- Include plenty of fruits and vegetables, which are naturally low in sodium, high in many vitamins and minerals, and a good source of fiber.

- Include omega-3 fatty acids, which may help reduce swelling and narrowing of airways in your lungs. Good sources include tuna, salmon, mackerel, sardines, walnuts and ground flaxseed.
- Limit caffeinated beverages to no more than two cups daily. Caffeine in limited amounts can relax muscles and open airways, but too much may lead to dehydration.
- If a fluid restriction has been advised, stay within it.
- Multivitamins and dietary supplements should be reviewed with your physician regularly; some can interfere with other medications.
- **Make changes gradually so they become part of your lifestyle.**

Maintain or achieve a desirable body weight

- Keeping a healthy weight with a balanced diet and regular exercise will help you feel better and more energetic.
- Carrying extra weight makes your heart and lungs work harder. Excess stomach (belly) fat crowds the diaphragm and makes it difficult to breathe.
- An underweight person also is at risk. Difficulty with breathing takes more energy, which creates a need for more calories. If you do not meet your calorie needs, the cycle of weight loss continues.

If you are underweight:

- Eat 5 to 6 small meals per day.
- Drink fluids between meals instead of with meals to avoid becoming too full.
- Add dry milk powder to foods and beverages.
- Add diced meats, grated cheese or cooked, dried beans to sauces, soups and casseroles.
- Add margarine, salad dressings or yogurt to vegetables.
- Between meals, sip on high-calorie and high protein beverages, such as commercial supplements.
- Keep snack-size items available, such as cheese and crackers, granola bars, unsalted peanuts, dried fruit, pudding, ice cream, yogurt, etc.

If you are overweight:

- Eat high-fiber foods such as fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Use less added fat and sugar.
- Choose lower calorie snacks, such as vegetables and fat-free dip or fresh fruit instead of candy bars and cookies.
- Limit distractions while eating (i.e., watching TV or reading).
- Eat slowly, putting your fork down between bites.
- Plan healthy, satisfying meals and snacks to prevent binge eating.
- Control portions by using smaller dishes and watching serving sizes.
- Focus on a healthy eating style, not “dieting” as diets are usually short lived and rarely produce long-term success.
- Exercise is the key to weight loss. Work with your doctor to establish realistic exercise goals. Join a pulmonary rehabilitation class.

Hints to make eating easier

- Ask a family member or friend to help with grocery shopping or cooking.
- Choose foods that are easy to prepare.
- Avoid foods that may cause gas or bloating, such as broccoli, cauliflower, nuts, raw onions, beans, peppers, Brussels sprouts and cabbage. They tend to make breathing more difficult.
- Cook large batches of food when feeling energetic; freeze leftovers.
- Rest just before eating.

- Eat five to six small meals per day.
- Eat the main meal when you are feeling more energetic.
- Eat soft foods that require less chewing. Chew foods slowly.
- Relax while eating. Limit conversation.
- If meal preparation becomes difficult, you may need to consider home-delivered meals or a senior meal site. Talk with your dietitian or social worker for more information.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem. Aurora Health Care is a not-for-profit health care provider and a national leader in efforts to improve the quality of health care.