

PATIENT GUIDE · CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE

Understanding COPD

This short guide explains what COPD is, how respiratory physiotherapy can help, and simple techniques you can start using today to manage breathlessness and stay active.

What is COPD?

COPD is a long-term condition where the airways become narrowed, making it harder to move air in and out of the lungs. The two most common forms are chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

Symptoms often include breathlessness on activity, a persistent cough, wheezing and repeated chest infections.

How respiratory physiotherapy helps

- Personalised breathing techniques to reduce breathlessness
- Airway clearance strategies for productive coughs
- Graded exercise to improve stamina safely
- Education to manage flare-ups and reduce hospital visits

Techniques you can try today

Pursed-lip breathing. Breathe in gently through your nose for 2 counts, then breathe out slowly through pursed lips for 4 counts. Repeat for 1–2 minutes when you feel breathless.

Paced walking. Match your breathing to your steps — breathe in for 1 step, out for 2. Slow down before you become out of breath, not after.

Recovery positions. Lean forward with your forearms on a table, or sit with elbows resting on your knees, to give your breathing muscles a mechanical advantage.

When to seek urgent help

- Sudden severe breathlessness or chest pain
- Coughing up blood
- Confusion or drowsiness
- A flare-up not settling with your usual medication

Before your appointment

Bring this completed checklist to your first session — it helps me understand your goals and design the right plan for you.

- Your main goal for treatment (e.g. climb stairs without stopping)
- A list of your current respiratory medications and inhalers
- Any recent hospital letters, spirometry or scan reports
- Notes on when symptoms are best and worst during the day
- Typical triggers (exercise, cold air, allergens, stress)
- Any recent chest infections in the past 12 months
- Details of past surgeries or hospital admissions
- Your usual level of daily activity
- Questions you'd like to ask during the session

This guide provides general education and is not a substitute for personal medical advice. If you experience severe breathlessness, chest pain, or a sudden change in symptoms, seek urgent medical attention.