



ASK THE BREATHWORKS COACH

**I have COPD and I'm tired all the time.
How can I manage to have the energy
to do the things I want to do?**

Many different things – diet, activity level, sleep, stress, depression, and the amount of oxygen in your blood – affect your energy level. Here, we'll focus on energy management: making the most of the energy you *do* have.

You already know COPD can leave you tired, breathless and 'out of gas'. When you feel that way, the easiest thing to do is...nothing. Trouble is, the less active you are, the more short of breath you become. But COPD doesn't have to stop you from enjoying life. In fact, staying active saves energy in the long run by making your muscles work efficiently – you spend more effort using unfit muscles. Learning how to cut corners on your energy use can help you stay active. Energy conservation or energy management means budgeting your energy so you can keep going, and make the most of your life.

Here are some tips to help you do just that.

1. Pace Yourself

Work at a slow, steady pace. If you start to feel tired or breathless, stop and rest. Better yet, rest *before* you become breathless or fatigued, by alternating short periods of work with short breaks. Remember: the dishes, laundry, and sweeping can wait.

Rushing robs you of energy, so reduce the need to hurry. Plan ahead, and leave yourself lots of time to get things done. For instance, if you're planning a trip, start packing a week early, rather than the day before departure. Put your clothes out the night before an early-morning appointment, and set the alarm an extra 15 minutes early.

Pace your meals. Eat small meals often and rest after eating. Jumping into an activity while your body is still digesting is a recipe for breathlessness.

Listen to your body. On days you feel like taking it easy, work shorter periods or do jobs that take less energy.

2. Set priorities

Figure out which jobs and hobbies are most important to you and focus on those.

Make sure some of the activities you love are high on the list; doing something you enjoy really does recharge your batteries! And make time for regular exercise — when your muscles are fit, you need less effort.

How can you shorten your must-do list? Do you really need to do all the ironing at once? Why not leave the ironing board up, and press only an item or two at a time? (Better yet – buy permanent press!) Do you have to dry dishes? How about letting them air dry? Why not cook potatoes in their skins, instead of peeling them?

Your priorities will change as you get used to managing your chronic disease. You may choose to break jobs into smaller steps, do some activities less often, or relax your standards a bit.

Learn to 'just say no!' to things you don't want to do or can't do. We do many things only because others expect us to.

3. Plan ahead

Plan your most tiring tasks for times when you have the most energy.

You'll probably feel best right after you've taken your medications, so time your activities accordingly. Are afternoons tough? Try preparing dinner in the morning or in stages throughout the afternoon. Do hot, humid days affect your breathing? Wait until cooler evenings to tackle chores.



Before leaving the house, think about the places you'll be going. Can you park near the door? Are there benches to sit on?

Where are the bathrooms located? A little planning can eliminate the panic of searching for a washroom or a place to rest. List the items on your grocery list in the same order you would find them in the grocery store. If you start in the veggie aisle, put lettuce and peppers at the top of your list. That way, you won't have to walk as far.

Similarly, you can plan your week by spreading out activities, and balancing work and rest each day. Keep your schedule flexible. That way, you can put off your plans on days you have less energy.

4. Adjust activities

Find easier, less tiring ways of doing chores:

these changes should help you stay active, rather than avoiding the activities altogether. (For example, sitting requires 25% less energy than standing.)

Below, we've listed some examples – no doubt you'll come up with many of your own.

- After a bath, slip on a terry robe instead of drying yourself.



- Shower while sitting on a bath stool.
- Sit while shaving, dressing, brushing your hair, or applying make-up.
- Consider trading your tub bath for a shower or a sponge bath – at least some days.
- Economize on stair climbing: Organize things so you make only one trip each day. (Hint: Use a laundry basket to collect items that need to be carried up or down at the end of the day.)
- Sit while peeling vegetables, washing dishes or ironing. Your chair should have good back support and allow you to sit without leaning.
- While making meals, make extra and freeze to use later.

Get creative - think of new ways to make hard tasks easier.

- Make bed-making easier by replacing heavy covers with a lightweight electric blanket or synthetic duvet.
- At bedtime, consider setting your clothes out for the next morning.
- Use your microwave or slow-cooker to prepare meals. It reduces the heat in your kitchen, and requires less energy to cook and clean-up.
- If you don't have a handicapped permit for your car, consider getting one.
- Try to avoid driving during rush hour. Driving on non-crowded streets is far less stressful, and you can avoid some air pollution, too.
- Shopping in small, efficiently-organized stores saves on walking.

5. Choose clothing carefully

Dress for comfort! Avoid tight-fitting bras and girdles, and choose garments that fit a little loosely. It's a bad idea to wear anything that pinches at the neck, or squeezes at the waist or chest when you inhale. (Suspenders are more comfortable than belts.) And, since tying shoelaces involves a lot of bending and stretching, try slip-on shoes when possible.

6. Organize your space

Unnecessary reaching wastes energy— particularly over your head or down to the floor. Organizing your space can cut down on tiring bending and twisting movements, and save

steps. For instance, before sitting down to work, organize tools and supplies within easy reach. And in the kitchen and workroom, plan counters and cupboards so the most frequently-used items are close at hand.

Here are a few other examples:

- Put your most frequently used objects in easy-to-reach drawers or shelves.
- Store socks and underwear in a waist-height drawer.
- Leave your shoes beside your bed, rather than by the front door.
- Before you shower or bathe, place all your soaps and shampoos within easy reach.
- Store pots in a chest-high cupboard or rack, rather than in the drawer beneath the stove.

7. Purchase proper tools

The right tools can save time and effort.

For example, to avoid lifting, use a wheeled cart or hand truck. To keep trips between kitchen and table to a minimum, carry plates, cutlery and hot dishes on a trolley. To reduce exposure to dust (which can irritate your airways), use a damp cloth instead of a feather duster, and consider wearing a mask while dusting and vacuuming.

Other items that can make everyday tasks easier:

- long-handled tongs
- long-handled shoehorns
- long-handled dustpans
- upright vacuum with disposable bag
- hand-held vacuum for small cleanups
- bath seat
- grab bars for the bathtub
- hand-held shower head
- raised toilet seat
- folding gardening stool

8. Ask for help

Asking for help doesn't mean losing your independence – it's a way of saving your energy for other, more important things.

Get help with jobs that make you breathless. Consider hiring help for household chores and yard work like lawn and garden maintenance, snow shoveling, and fall clean-up. Consider Meals on Wheels, or home grocery delivery.

9. Use relaxation techniques

Take time to relax. Tension, anxiety and worry can make you feel more tired and short of breath. Planning time for activities you enjoy and practicing a relaxation technique such as visualization or deep breathing might be helpful. And don't forget to listen to your body, so you can rest before you get tired.



10. Think about your posture

Proper posture saves energy.

Working with your back bent or shoulders slumped boosts your chances of muscle strain and increases the likelihood you'll hold your breath.

Try to avoid bending and lifting. Push, pull or slide instead. If you must lift or carry, lift with your legs, use both hands, and hold the object close to your body. Choose work surfaces that allow you to sit or stand straight. Experiment with counters and chairs of different heights. (Hint: Adjust the height of a table by placing sturdy books or blocks under the legs.)

Remember to change positions frequently.

11. Control your breathing

Controlling your breathing while you're exerting yourself can help reduce shortness of breath and fatigue.

- Exhale when you're using the most effort. For instance, when bending, inhale while you are upright, and exhale as you bend.
- Do not hold your breath!
- Practice pursed-lip and diaphragmatic breathing techniques, so they come naturally.

For more information on controlled breathing techniques, check out The Lung Association factsheet **Breathlessness**.

***Remember,
you can do it!***



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