



Exercising with cystic fibrosis

Every move counts

Move more and reduce your sedentary time each day by incorporating different types of movement. It is never too late to start, some is always better than none!

How to get started

Regular exercise will help to improve your overall health and ability to enjoy the activities of daily living. Exercise has been shown to improve your aerobic capacity, that is, your ability to stay active for longer. Strength exercises help you to build muscle mass and improve posture. Exercise may also improve mucous clearance and preserve and prevent the deterioration of your lung function.

You can still exercise if you are using oxygen therapy, as prescribed; discuss this with your doctor or healthcare provider. You can modify your exercise plan around symptoms or changes in your condition to maximize the health benefits.

Warm up and cool down

Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely. Warm-up exercises include dynamic stretches, range-of-motion activities and low intensity movements. This can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool-down to ensure your heart rate and breathing rate return to normal safely. Cool down exercises include slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity and simple stretches.

Be active

Some is good, more is better

How much:	Aim for at least 150-300 minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least 75-150 minutes a week of vigorous intensity physical activity. Start moving more each day increasing to regular movement every day and add sessions as your strength and stamina improve.
How hard:	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary. Ask for advice on distinguishing between breathlessness from exercise and abnormal shortness of breath to help you manage your exercise plan safely. Short burst, high intensity activity is a good way to achieve and maintain cardiovascular fitness.
How long:	Aim to spread out sessions throughout the week. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10 minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer.
What type:	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities: walking, cycling, jogging, dancing, swimming, water aerobics, hiking—choose something you enjoy! Recreational team sports such as soccer, tennis, or volleyball are great social activities too! Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health.

What will it do for me?

Regular exercise has been shown to significantly improve your peak aerobic capacity (ability to be more active over a longer time), activity levels and quality of life. It also significantly reduces the risk of developing infections by improving your immune system and reduces your heart disease, type 2 diabetes, joint problems and osteoporosis risk.

Build strength

How much:	At least twice a week.
How hard:	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time.
How long:	Choose a variety of 8–10 exercises for the upper and lower body, focusing on the postural muscles such as the back and core muscles and the pelvic floor, and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Aim for 3 sets of each exercise.
What type:	A variety of strength exercises using free weights, resistance machines or household items such as a can of beans or a weighted water bottle as a weight. At home or the gym, try squats, calf raises, wall push ups, arm curls, knee curls, front and side arm raises or chair stands.

What will it do for me?

Strength exercises help to build muscle mass and tone, assist with weight maintenance and improve posture, reducing your risk of falls by maintaining core strength and improving balance.

Improve balance

How much:	At least three days a week.. Start with one session per week, if necessary, and gradually work towards two.
How hard:	Choose 2–3 balance exercises, and repeat each exercise 10–15 times.
How long:	Hold each balance for 10-30 seconds.
What type:	Try yoga, Tai Chi or simple home balance exercises. Always exercise safely when doing balance exercises. If you are at high risk of falling, do seated balance exercises or exercise using a sturdy chair or wall for support.

What will it do for me?

Practicing balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to a loss of balance and can help reduce the risk of falls, fractures and injuries, an important consideration for cystic fibrosis patients given the related increase in the risk of osteoporosis.

Sedentary living

Reduce the amount of time being sedentary. Move more and break up sedentary time. Sedentary behavior is defined as time spent sitting or lying with low energy expenditure, while awake in the context of occupational, educational, home and community settings, and travel. Higher amounts of sedentary behavior can increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.



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Replace sedentary behavior with more physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity). It is possible to avoid sedentary behaviour and be physically active while sitting or lying, through, for example, upper body led activities, inclusive and/or wheelchair-specific sport and activities. Try seated stretches for those with limited mobility; using active forms of transport; standing while working (within your abilities and environment), and other accessible active options to replace sedentary time.

Your exercise, your way!

Increased endurance, stronger muscles, greater stability in lung function and better drainage of secretions can contribute to significant improvement in your quality of life. Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Always exercise within your abilities. If mobility is difficult, adapted cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises may be better alternatives. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer. Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none.**

Helpful resources

Cystic Fibrosis Canada gives tips on staying active and living a healthy lifestyle while living with cystic fibrosis. <https://www.cysticfibrosis.ca/our-programs/resources>

Contact Cystic Fibrosis Canada to learn more about referrals or support programs that may suit you. Email at helpline@cysticfibrosis.ca or by phone at 1-800-378-2233 ext. 403

Exercise safety

You may need to do airway clearance treatments before exercise as this can help increase the length of time you are able to exercise comfortably. Exercise can loosen more secretions so you might need to do airway clearance treatments after the workout.

Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.

Avoid dehydration and ensure you eat enough food so you have enough energy for exercise and the activities of daily living. Work with a dietitian to address nutritional needs related to exercise.

When you are exercising at a gym, it is important to maintain good hygiene to avoid picking up germs. Try disinfecting equipment, washing your hands regularly and bringing your own mat, water bottle and towel.

Ask your specialist, doctor or healthcare provider for specific information about how to exercise safely and maintain an exercise plan. Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10–15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level.

Aim to get slightly out of breath, but exercise sensibly and stop the activity if you feel unwell.

Avoid extreme weather conditions. Try and exercise in the morning or later evening, or in a temperature controlled environment.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary, and drink water before, during and after exercise .

Choose environments that you can access freely and safely. Please ask your healthcare provider or local leisure organizations for advice on the best option for you.

Scan for more physical activity resources!

