One Step at a Time: How to Get Walking With COPD

by RUSSELL WINWOOD

Walking With COPD

Whether you're newly diagnosed with COPD or an existing patient being mobile is crucial to improving your quality of life. In this article, I'm going to give you my tips on how to get motivated and get walking with COPD.

Is Walking Good for COPD? And Tips on Finding Motivation

Before you curl up in a ball because this all seems too hard, think to yourself how much better you'd feel if you could become more mobile.

What is your motivation?

- Do you watch your grandchildren play wishing you could join in?
- Avoid social occasions because you're embarrassed about being on oxygen or becoming out of breath?
- Do you feel like you're always making excuses to people for not participating?

Does this sound familiar? You're not alone; there was a time where I was embarrassed about my disease. But for me being engaged in life was a better option than hiding in a corner feeling sorry for myself.

COPD is preventable and manageable, and you just need to find the inner strength to fight.

Start by listing the things you miss doing. Next, to each activity write the reason why you can't do it now? There may seem insurmountable obstacles, but there may be a way other options.

When I was diagnosed, the thought of not being able to realize my dreams upset me. I had some goals, seeing my kids grow up, meeting my grandchildren and participating in sporting events were all on my list I wanted to achieve.

These goals were motivation enough for me to get moving, people telling me I couldn't do them gave me even more motivation. I've seen my kids grow up, grandchildren haven't arrived yet, but I still run marathons – slowly! Yes, I'm breathless. Yes, I need oxygen at times. And yes, it's hard to exercise. But this is a small price to pay for my quality of life.

Now you may not want to run a marathon, in fact running marathons isn't the greatest thing you can do for your body. Identify your goals and set a plan in motion to achieve them.

Good Preparations for a Good Walk

Where do you start? First stop is the doctor's clinic to discuss your exercise plan. Once you have done this, there are some strategies I use which can apply to any form of exercise.

- **Equipment** – If you're planning to start regular walking it's important to have appropriate, comfortable footwear. One thing which can put people off being mobile is soreness after they exercise. Proper footwear plays an important part in protecting those rusty joints, muscles, and ligaments. It is a good idea to buy a pulse oximeter if you haven't already. Monitoring your heart rate and oxygen saturation while exercising will ensure you won't overdo things. Your doctor can advise you about the levels you should adhere to.
- **Stretching** – if you haven't been mobile for some time or even if you have, stretching is an important tool to warm up those muscles, ligaments, and joints. Stretching will also aid in maintaining proper form and posture while you are mobile.
- **Nutrition** – the much-forgotten part of exercising. If you want to gain maximum performance out of your motor vehicle, then you use premium fuel. Your body is no different. Have a donut and soft drink before you exercise, and your body will not be firing on all cylinders. Prime your body with whole quality foods and your body will be able to engage in more meaningful exercise.
- **Medication** – Don't start any exercise unless you have taken your medication. I made this mistake once many years ago and ended up in a world of trouble. If you use a reliever inhaler make sure it goes with you.
- **Location** – This is important when you're first starting out. Workout where you will be the most comfortable. In your own home, a gym or outdoors. Your mobility will often dictate your location.
- **Timing** – Exercise is always better if it's undertaken at a time of day where you're at your best. This could be morning, middle of the day or late afternoon/evening. Also, take into account the weather if you will be exercising outdoors.
- **Hydration** – Whether it's hot or cold, whether you're inside or out, it's crucial to keep yourself hydrated while exercising. Just a small sip of water every 10 minutes is plenty when you're first starting out. When you exercise, you sweat and keeping hydrated will keep your body working well.

Getting Mobile

For some patients, getting mobile could be pushing their walker around the lounge room and if this is your starting point, then it's ok. Every patient will be at different levels of mobility and fitness.

The most important thing is you're on your way to building your exercise capacity.

If you are walking around your house, it's important before you start to clear a passage, so you do not have to move things once you've started. If you are walking outside find an area less populated so you don't have to be concerned about being knocked over by a stray child or dog. Trust me, I've seen it happen.

For those who choose a treadmill in a gym or at home, it's always better to underestimate your starting speed. Gradually increase your pace as you feel comfortable. Overtime as your exercise capacity builds you can increase your speed, adjust the incline or both.

The same rules apply if you're not on a treadmill. Start walking slowly and build your speed gradually. As you become fitter, you can add in challenges, such as going up stairs or hills. Squats or just getting up and down off a chair is an excellent way to build your leg strength if you are in your home.

The Bottom Line...

They key is consistency, no matter what your level of fitness or mobility is. I started walking slowly and gradually built my exercise capacity; it didn't happen overnight. I can run, cycle and swim because of years of consistent training and look after my body.

As COPD patients, we have limitations, but we can still live well with this disease. The earlier we are diagnosed, the earlier we change our lifestyle, the better our outcomes will be. Remember – Never let your condition define you!