

New data reveals public ignorance about the impact of lung disease

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New data released by the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) to coincide with World Spirometry Day today has revealed a worrying lack of understanding and concern among the public about the world's biggest killer - lung disease, which now claims the lives of almost 4 million people a year.

Despite the high incidence of [lung disease](#), research conducted by YouGov across four continents revealed that people are far more worried about cancer, [heart disease](#) and stroke . This lack of concern is even more striking as data shows that while the other major diseases have been decreasing as a cause of death in the [last three decades](#), death due to [COPD](#) has doubled in the same period.

As well as underestimating the impact of lung disease, the public poll reveals a lack of understanding about how to manage it. Despite the fact that simple lung tests like spirometry can help detect conditions such as COPD and asthma before the onset of debilitating symptoms, the survey revealed that the majority, 57%, of [respondents](#) have never had their lungs tested.

The research also revealed that 70% thought that those with lung disease were unable to undertake even [moderate exercise](#) like swimming or going to the gym. However, in reality, physical activity can help to manage and improve the symptoms of lung disease such as [breathlessness](#), even in the most severe cases.

As the world gears up to the Olympics, FIRS is using the new data to urge people to get their lungs tested and to get active to improve their lung health. What's more, with only 41% of those already suffering from a lung disease claiming to have discussed the importance of [physical activity](#) with a healthcare professional, FIRS is encouraging current patients to approach healthcare practitioners to talk about the benefits of exercise.

On World Spirometry Day, and throughout the build up to the Olympics, [healthcare professionals](#) will be taking to the streets across the globe to run public lung testing events to raise awareness of spirometry testing. The test, which usually takes less than 10 minutes, is the most effective way of testing lung health.

The Chair of FIRS and President of the European Respiratory Society (ERS), Klaus Rabe, said:

"Chronic lung disease is a major health issue but – as the FIRS poll shows – its burden continues to be underestimated. There is widespread ignorance not only around the seriousness of lung disease but about what can be done to prevent it. As countries across the world celebrate the achievements of the world's best athletes – we feel the time is right to focus on how we can all improve our lung health.

"Respiratory physicians understand more and more about the importance of exercise but our research confirms ignorance is still out there. Even gentle walking for those with severe disease can help in improving lung capacity and general well being and we must get this message through to patients".

Monica Fletcher, Chair of the European Lung Foundation, who has coordinated the global initiative of WSD, said:

"World Spirometry Day provides a point in time for people to understand the importance of getting their lungs tested. Early diagnosis for lung conditions can lead to more effective interventions which, in turn can help alleviate symptoms and slow the progression of the disease."

A number of high-profile athletes are supporting the campaign, to highlight what can be achieved by those suffering from lung diseases and encourage more people to take up exercise. Some 448 competitors in the 2004 Olympics in Athens had chronic lung conditions .

Supporters include Norwegian Olympic rower, Olaf Tufte, who has won two gold and one silver medal, despite suffering from severe allergic asthma. Talking about his own experiences of lung disease, Olaf said:

"I am determined not to let my asthma limit me or restrict my ambitions. Instead, I see it as one challenge among many that I need to master in order to come top in my sport. People with [lung](#) conditions can lead healthy, active lives – if they take steps to ensure their condition is identified early enough and treated well."

More information: For information about World Spirometry Day, and the testing events taking place in your area or across Europe, please visit: www.wsd2012.european-lung-foundation.org

Provided by European Lung Foundation

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