

# Walking helps COPD sufferers breathe easy

October 31 2014, by Denise Cahill

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Walking significantly improved walking capacity and quality of life for sufferers of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. Credit: Brian Giesen

Something as simple as a walk can help people diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), research has shown.

The multidisciplinary study, involving researchers from Curtin University's School of Physiotherapy and Exercise Science, Sir Charles

Gairdner Hospital and Sydney University, examined the effect of a supervised ground-based walking [training program](#) on people with COPD.

COPD is a serious, progressive and disabling condition that limits airflow in the lungs.

Associate Professor Sue Jenkins says smoking is the main but not only cause of COPD, and most sufferers develop significant symptoms in their 50s or 60s.

Affecting both men and women, COPD's most distressing symptom is breathlessness.

"People with COPD are breathless, and because they are breathless they limit the amount of activity they do, so they become very deconditioned, and they become anxious because of their breathlessness," Prof Jenkins says.

## **Walking to wellness**

The study involved more than 140 people aged 69 who had been diagnosed with COPD, recruited in Perth and Sydney.

They were randomised to a treatment group that underwent an eight-week high-intensity walking program, or to a [control group](#) that did not receive exercise training.

Participants in the walking group attended [training sessions](#) three times a week for eight weeks, with their heart rate and oxygen saturation measured before and after exercising.

Walking training was performed on a flat indoor track within

participating hospitals in WA and NSW, and was supervised by physiotherapists experienced in providing pulmonary rehabilitation for people with COPD. Training sessions started at 30 minutes and built up to about 45 minutes.

"What we found is that walking training alone, supervised by a physiotherapist, significantly improved walking capacity and quality of life compared to the outcomes in the control group," she says.

Prof Jenkins says walking training was investigated as the sole modality of exercise because it was an important activity of daily living, requiring no specialised equipment and easily implemented in rural or remote areas without gymnasiums.

She says ground-based walking training could easily be implemented in the home, allowing study participants to continue exercising in the longer term, which could maintain the benefits they received during the study.

The study and its findings were recently published in the *European Respiratory Journal*.

**More information:** "Ground-based walking training improves quality of life and exercise capacity in COPD." *Eur Respir J*. 2014 Oct;44(4):885-94. [DOI: 10.1183/09031936.00078014](https://doi.org/10.1183/09031936.00078014). Epub 2014 Aug 19.

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