

Realistic fitness goals key for lung disease sufferers

February 22 2016, by Lily Yeang, Sciencenetwork Wa



A helpful approach could be as simple as going for a short walk if people have been sitting without any break for a long time. Credit: Phil Norton

People with lung disease should exercise in small intervals throughout the day in order to safely maximise their physical activity, a review of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) studies has advised.

The research, involving local and interstate experts, states that

performing 150 minutes of exercise a week is proven to reduce cardiovascular and metabolic disease, risk of developing some cancers, and all-cause mortality.

However, this is often unattainable for people with COPD, senior author and Curtin University researcher Kylie Hill says.

COPD collectively refers to lung diseases—most commonly emphysema, chronic bronchitis and chronic asthma—which prevent proper breathing and aren't fully reversible.

"There is strong evidence that exercise, in the long run, will absolutely help people with COPD to reduce their breathlessness, improve their energy levels, increase their exercise capacity and help with their quality of life," Associate Professor Hill says.

"[However] asking people with COPD to walk at a moderate intensity for 30 minutes most days is a tall order."

About one in 13 of Australians suffer from lung disease, with symptoms such as shortness of breath making any sort of exertion hard.

For this reason, A/Prof Hill says sufferers should set achievable goals that incorporate physical activity into their everyday routines and reduce overall sedentary behaviour.

Simple steps to increasing fitness

"In addition to trying to do some exercise regularly, it is important for people with COPD to try and sit less," she says.

"This will be a useful approach to reduce their risk of developing a disease in their heart or blood vessels, especially because it is so difficult

for them to increase their physical activity."

A helpful approach could be as simple as going for a short walk if people have been sitting without any break for a long time.

"For people with severe disease, simple goals like this may be a more realistic place to start than trying to go for a 30 minute walk each day," she says.

A/Prof Hill says people who have severe breathlessness should also consider doing a program of pulmonary rehabilitation.

Pulmonary rehabilitation programs often include supervised walking training and often also cycle based exercise.

Many COPD sufferers are also advised to undertake functional resistance (e.g. step-ups and half squats) to strengthen their leg muscles.

The review of various published studies included experts from Curtin, UWA and The University of Queensland in the area of [lung disease](#), health behaviour change, [physical activity](#) and sedentary behaviour.

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