

Royal Brompton Hospital

Exercise advice for people with pulmonary hypertension

This leaflet provides information about exercising if you have pulmonary hypertension. We recommend exercise because research shows that mild to moderate physical activity is safe and benefits people with pulmonary hypertension.

Benefits of exercise for people with pulmonary hypertension

Exercise can help you to:

- keep your lungs and heart healthy, and your bones strong
- make respiratory muscles stronger which will help with your breathing
- strengthen your arm and leg muscles
- lose weight
- increase your sense of wellbeing and improve your mood

How to exercise

1. We recommend you do 150 minutes of mild to moderate intensity of exercise a week. You could achieve this by exercising for 30 minutes, 5 days each week. You can break down each 30 minutes into 3 10-minute sessions if 30 minutes is too much for you.

2. Start gradually and build up slowly. Most importantly, listen to your body. When exercising at home, it is important that you warm up before exercising and cool down after exercising. This will allow your heart rate and blood pressure to gradually adjust to activity or rest.

3. Exercise should mainly be aerobic. Aerobic exercise is any physical activity that:

- makes you sweat
- causes you to breathe harder
- gets your heart beating faster than at rest

Examples of aerobic exercise include walking, cycling, climbing stairs and jogging.

4. You need to do some strengthening exercise. This is often described as resistance exercise because it increases muscle strength by making muscles work against a weight or force. Examples include using light weights and light resistance bands. We recommend that patients with pulmonary hypertension do not lift any heavy weights, particularly weights over the head.
5. Try to build exercise into your daily activities. For example, walking to the shops.
6. Find an activity you enjoy so it becomes a regular part of your life.

Exercise tips

- Exercise in a well-ventilated room or outside. If possible, have someone at home with you when you are exercising.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing and supportive non-slip shoes.
- Warm up before each session (even short 10-minute sessions).
Warm-up exercises could include:
 - Ankle pumping while sitting in a chair. Use both feet, pull your toes up toward your head, then point your toes down 10 times.
 - Shoulder shrugs.
 - Marching on the spot for between 30 and 60 seconds.
- Do not hold your breath when exercising.
- Exercise at the right level for you. Do not do any exercise that makes you strain and hold your breath when your muscles are contracting. For example, lifting a heavy weight.
- Make sure you drink enough water.
- Cool down after each exercise session. This will allow your heart rate, blood pressure and breathing to gradually return to normal.
- Avoid drinking caffeinated energy or stimulant drinks, such as Red Bull, as they can increase your heart rate.
- Remember every day is different. you will have more energy and be able to do more on some days than others.

Don't start exercise

- If the weather is very hot.
- If you are feeling unwell or are particularly tired.
- If you have had recent infection or change to medicine.

During an exercise session

If you start to feel very tired or a little unwell, rest until the symptoms have settled down. Then carry on, if you can.

Stop exercising completely if you:

- have extreme breathlessness (to the extent that you cannot talk)
- have any chest pain or palpitations
- start to feel dizzy or faint

Important

Note: Being short of breath is not dangerous but you should not feel unwell during exercise.

The BORG scale

The BORG scale is a simple way to measure how your breathing feels during exercise. The scale below ranges from 0 (no breathlessness) to 10 (maximum breathlessness). When exercising you should always aim to be moderately breathless, which is 3 out of 10 on the BORG scale.

The BORG scale is pictured below

0	Nothing at all
0.5	Very, very slight (just noticeable)
1	Very slight
2	Slight (light)
3	Moderate
4	Somewhat severe
5	Severe (heavy)
6	
7	Very severe
8	
9	
10	Very, very severe

Slow down or take a short rest if you:

- are too breathless to speak
- or can't say more than one word at a time

Contact us

Please contact the pulmonary hypertension team if you have any questions.

PH clinical nurse specialists extension

Email: gstt.phnurses@nhs.net

Phone 020 020 7352 8121, extension 82156 Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Was this leaflet useful?

If you have any comments about this information, we'd be happy to hear from you.
email gstt.healthcontent@nhs.net

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please contact the department your appointment is with.

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern about any service or department at Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals. Contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

- Royal Brompton Hospital **phone** 020 7349 7715
- Harefield Hospital **phone** 01895 826 572

Or **email** gstt.rbhh-pals@nhs.net

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A list of sources is available on request

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