



## Pulmonary Rehabilitation: Maximizing Function

The primary goal of pulmonary rehabilitation is to help chronic lung disease patients achieve the highest possible level of independent function. The specific goals are to improve the quality of life by:

- Decreasing respiratory symptoms and complications
- Permitting a return to work or leisure activities
- Increasing control over daily functioning
- Improving physical conditioning and exercise performance
- Improving emotional well-being
- Reducing hospitalizations

Because of the lung's large reserve capacity, the disease may advance significantly before symptoms are noticeable. Therefore, it is important to initiate pulmonary rehabilitation in a timely manner.

Pulmonary rehabilitation has been shown to help patients who have chronic lung disease, but there is not a single formula for all patients. Thus, a customized plan should be developed. Successful pulmonary rehabilitation focuses on three important features:

- **A multidisciplinary approach**

Various members of the health care team have roles to play in pulmonary rehabilitation. These individuals might include doctors, nurses, a rehabilitation therapist, social worker, dietitian, and the patient. After evaluation by the team, the personalized program will be coordinated by a specially trained nurse, a rehabilitation specialist, or a respiratory care practitioner.

- **An individualized program tailored to your needs**

Patients begin at different levels of pulmonary function, with different physical abilities. Both the starting point and the patient's goals should be accounted for in designing the pulmonary rehabilitation plan. Your physician may have suggestions for pulmonary function test goals that can be measured and tracked over the course of your illness. On the other hand, many patients have practical objectives concerned with maintaining daily functioning. The individualized program design should take these different viewpoints into account and be a practical tool for managing your disease.

- **Attention to physical and social function**

Both aerobic and strength training have positive effects on your pulmonary health. Exercise can improve heart and lung function and help you through periods of shortness of breath. Some people decrease their activity for fear of exacerbating the disease, but exercise serves to strengthen and condition you and thus improve your health. The components of an exercise plan might be walking, stationary bicycling, water exercise, or simple aerobics. Stress management and breathing techniques may also be useful. Effective weight and nutrition management are also important components of pulmonary rehabilitation. Pulmonary impairment and fatigue can interfere with proper nutrition, and weight control can diminish fatigue and shortness of breath. A dietitian can help you transition to a healthy nutrition plan that will contribute to the achievement of your goals.



In addition to your physical challenges, keeping a healthy positive attitude is often difficult for patients with chronic lung disease. This poses special problems for patients and caregivers. For more information please see the PILOT™ Patient Counseling Tool, **Emotional Well-Being**.

## **RESOURCES**

---

American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation. Available at:  
<http://www.aacvpr.org/dmtf/pulmonaryspecific.cfm#arti1>. Accessed August 2007.

National Jewish Medical and Research Center. Pulmonary Rehabilitation. Available at:  
<http://www.nationaljewish.org/disease-info/diseases/copd/mgmt/pulm-rehab/index.aspx>. Accessed August 2007.

Ries AL, Bauldoff GS, Carlin BW, et al. Pulmonary Rehabilitation: Joint ACCP/AACVPR Evidence-Based Clinical Practice Guidelines. *Chest*. 2007;131:4S-42S.

PILOT™ Patient Counseling Tool. *Emotional Well-Being*. Available at:  
[http://www.pilotforipf.org/resources/PtCounseling\\_01.pdf](http://www.pilotforipf.org/resources/PtCounseling_01.pdf). Accessed August 2007.