

MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



Pulmonary Rehabilitation

What is Pulmonary Rehabilitation?

Pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) is a program for people with chronic lung disease. These may include emphysema, chronic bronchitis, asthma, bronchiectasis and interstitial lung disease.

Most PR programs include:

- Medical management,
- Exercise,
- Breathing retraining,
- Education,
- Emotional support and
- Nutrition counseling.

The purpose of PR is to help people lead a full, satisfying life and restore them to their highest functional capacity. The specific goals of PR are to improve quality of life by:

- Decreasing respiratory symptoms and complications,
- Encouraging self-management and control over daily functioning,
- Improving physical conditioning and exercise performance,
- Improving emotional well-being and
- Reducing hospitalizations.

The Team Approach

Most formal PR programs include a team of health care providers. They include doctors, nurses, rehabilitation therapists, psychosocial staff and dietitians working together. The team evaluates each person's overall physical and emotional status. An individual program is then developed. The doctor, a specially trained registered nurse, a rehabilitation specialist, or a respiratory care practitioner coordinate the program.

Improving Physical Activity

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Exercise is a key part of a PR program. Exercise can improve the function of your heart and lungs. Exercise can also strengthen the muscles used for breathing to decrease your shortness of breath. It is common for people with lung disease to limit physical activities because they are fearful of becoming short of breath. When you are inactive, the strength of your muscles and heart decline. PR helps you pursue activities to the fullest extent of your abilities. It also helps maintain physical fitness and regain control of your breathing. Exercise training can take place one to one or in a group setting. It may include walking, stationary bicycling, water exercise, or simple aerobics. Breathing training, relaxation techniques, and energy conservation for many daily activities are also addressed.

Learning About Your Illness

Education is an important part of a PR program for both the person and family. Education may include one to one teaching, written materials and group classes. Videos and other visual aides may also be used. Teaching sessions with a health care provider are very important. The sessions will help provide you with information about your specific medications, treatments, and self-management at home.

Learning To Cope

A number of emotions can interfere with daily living. These include anxiety and depression. They can also increase shortness of breath. Studies show that depression is common because of the limitations caused by the chronic lung disease. Counseling can help you and your family cope with the chronic disease. Classes on managing stress, relaxation and coping with chronic illness may be offered. Some P.R. Programs may also have a support group for you and your family.

Improving Nutrition

Weight management and nutrition are important issues for people with chronic lung disease. Shortness of breath and fatigue can interfere with your ability to eat a balanced diet. The amount and type of food, as well as the timing of meals can cause increased shortness of breath. A dietitian can offer practical suggestions for healthy nutrition, food selection and preparation. Individualized diet plans may be developed when problems such as fatigue, shortness of breath, swallowing, or poor appetite interfere with good nutrition.

Participating In A Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program

There are many differences in the scheduling, length and individual components of PR programs. Medicare and other insurance plans provide varying levels of coverage. If you are interested in PR, discuss this with your health care provider. Ask about information from your insurance program. Your local American Lung Association or hospital may know about programs in your area. Important questions to ask about a PR program include:

- Do you need a referral from a doctor?
- Is there active involvement by a team of health care providers?
- What services does the program offer?
- How long is the program?

- What activities can you expect?
- What is the insurance coverage?

The Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program at National Jewish Health

National Jewish provides comprehensive PR services. The PR team at National Jewish includes pulmonary doctors, specially trained registered nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, recreational therapists, psychosocial clinicians, and dietitians. A referral from a doctor is needed. Based on medical necessity, the person may receive a medical evaluation and treatment, one to one and group education, physical conditioning, nutrition evaluation and counseling. This will allow people to resume an active daily life, to live better and feel better. For more information about the PR program at National Jewish, call the toll free LUNG-LINE® at 1-800-222-LUNG or visit our web page at NJHealth.org

Note: This information is provided to you as an educational service of National Jewish. It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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