

# A Breath of Fresh Air

A newsletter for Reliant Medical Group COPD patients and their families

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*Edited by Margalit Lai, RN, MS, Lead COPD Program Care Manager*

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I have some news to share with you that is both happy and sad. Chris Andersson, who has been with us for the last eight years and has taken care of many of you, is retiring at the beginning of April. I know that most of us don't like change but we all also know that change is inevitable. I am sure you will quickly get to know our new nurse, **Pamela Howell**, who is replacing Chris. I will, of course, still be here to help you with anything. Pamela is an experienced nurse with an advanced degree and a delightful personality. I have no doubt you will warm up to her in no time. Pamela will introduce herself in our next newsletter. In the meantime, I ask you to join me in thanking Chris for her many years of dedicated care and wish her a wonderful, well deserved retirement.



What started out as a fairly typical winter for our area has turned into a very cold and snowy one that shows no signs of letting up. I know it's not always easy to deal with the cold temperatures, short days and inclement weather. We have already had one "historic" snowstorm and I just hope we get through the other storms this winter without major problems. I am sure that all of you – except those of you who go out snowplowing for the rest of us – will stay home and be comfortable. The main concern is the loss of power, especially if you are on oxygen. You should all have back-up oxygen that does not require electricity. I also hope that those of you who are supposed to have prescriptions on hand for antibiotics and prednisone, actually do have these medications at home. Please keep this in mind for the next big storm that is sure to come. I would also like to remind all of you (those who shovel and those who don't) that during these winter months you should limit your exposure to the cold air as much as possible, especially when the temperature drops below the freezing point. If you have to go out, make sure your car is warm before you get in and put a scarf over your face so that the air you breathe in gets a little warmed up before it hits your lungs.

# Physical Activity and COPD

by Margalit Lai, RN, MS, Lead COPD Program Care Manager

Staying active is a very important part of your action plan that should lead to a longer life as well as a better quality of life. Exercise helps your blood circulate and helps your heart send oxygen to your body. It also strengthens your respiratory – or breathing – muscles so it's easier for you to breathe.

Exercise has been proven to:



Increase your energy level,



Decrease your need for oxygen,



Decrease your anxiety, stress and depression,



Improve your sleep, self-esteem, cardiovascular fitness and muscle strength



Decrease your shortness of breath.

Frankly, no medicine can offer so many benefits. The best part of all is that it is basically free. Many of you can join Silver Sneakers at no (or minimal) charge through your health plan. Going for a simple walk is also free. Now I can already hear you telling me that in this, too cold, too hot, too humid, rainy, snowy, or allergy-prone kind of weather you cannot possibly walk. However, there are always stores and malls where you can take a walk inside. In fact, you can walk to your heart's content almost any day of the year this way. Walking in stores has the added advantage of allowing you to lean on the shopping cart in which you can also place your oxygen, if you are on it.

The types of exercises that would most benefit you are: stretching, aerobic and resistance.



**Stretching** relaxes you and improves your flexibility. It's also a good way to warm up before and cool down after exercising. Practice holding a gentle stretch for 10 to 30 seconds, slowly breathing in and out and repeat a few times.

**Aerobic exercise** is good for your heart and lungs and allows you to use oxygen more efficiently. Walking outdoors when the weather is good or indoors when it's not, is a good example of an aerobic exercise.

Walking on a treadmill that tells you exactly how hard you are working so you can gradually increase your level of exertion has a good motivating effect. Biking



on a stationary bike is especially good for people who have knee or foot issues and should not be putting pressure on their joints. There are cheap and effective pedal exercisers you can use instead of a stationary bike to achieve similar effects.

Swimming and water aerobics are other great examples of aerobic exercise. Of course, for these you need a pool, but there's always the local "Y." Try to do these types of exercise for about half an hour a few times a week. You should try to gradually work up to 30 minutes a day.

**Resistance training** makes all your muscles stronger, including the ones that help you breathe. It usually involves weights or resistance bands, but you don't need to go to a gym to do resistance training. You can get yourself weights at any department store or you can use soup cans. Here is a link to some exercises you can do sitting down: [www.grandparents.com/health-and-wellbeing/exercise-and-de-stress/chair-exercises](http://www.grandparents.com/health-and-wellbeing/exercise-and-de-stress/chair-exercises). To get stronger, do these exercises 3-4 times a week.

**Breathing while exercising** – If you are on oxygen, use it while exercising. If you have a pulse oximeter, check your oxygen levels while exercising. Remember to inhale (breathe in) before starting the exercise and exhale (breathe out) through the most difficult part of the exercise. Take slow breaths and pace yourself. Purse your lips while breathing as if you want to whistle.

To increase your chances of sticking with an exercise program, do it every day at the same time, preferably in the morning before all kinds of distractions take your mind off what's really important.



***Never say: "I did not want to bother you"... "I thought I would get better"... "I had an appointment with you already scheduled." Please call if you need us!***



## Patient Contributions

➔ Many of you have heard me say you should avoid bending because it causes you to be more short of breath as a result of pressure put on your diaphragm. **Barbara Barnes** has found a way to get around this. She uses a grabber or reacher that allows her to reach items up high or pick up items down low even in tight spaces. Barbara uses it, for example, to get her laundry out of the dryer without bending.



➔ **Joel Winslow** just came back from Florida, driving all the way down and back. While driving he used a Powercup Inverter which he highly recommends for anyone who travels. This converter enables you to plug in any electric gadget you have such as your nebulizer, oxygen, cellphone etc., and not worry about depleting your battery. A unique coffee cup shape fits into your vehicle cup holders. Joel found it online for \$23.

➔ Another great recommendation from **Joel Winslow** for those of you who have been struggling to bring up phlegm. Joel highly recommends a device that he says is the one thing that has most improved his breathing. The Aerobika OPEP is a device you connect to your nebulizer although, if you don't have a nebulizer, you can use it too. It helps remove the mucus build up in your airways which in turn makes it possible for the air to move in and out of your lungs. When your airways are open and not blocked by mucus the medicine in your other inhalers moves in more efficiently and effectively. Joel connects the Aerobika to his nebulizer which he uses every 12 hours before using his Foradil. For those of you who are on Serevent, Advair, Symbicort, Dulera, Anoro or Breo, you can use your nebulizer before those inhalers too. Joel says he starts coughing during the treatment. He stops every three minutes to do the huff cough which helps even more. If you are given this device in the hospital, make sure to take it home with you. It would be thrown away by the hospital if you don't. To prevent your next hospitalization you can buy the device at [www.aerobika-therapy.com](http://www.aerobika-therapy.com) or call at (877) 853-9990. Unfortunately it's not inexpensive. It costs \$96.50 (about the cost of 10 packs of cigarettes!). It may also be available on Ebay, just do a search under the name.



***Birthdays are good for you. The more you have, the longer you live.***



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