

# PULMONARY REHABILITATION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## What is it?

Pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) is a structured programme of exercise and education for people with chronic chest conditions, e.g. COPD. It is designed to improve your level of fitness and quality of life and can help you learn to cope, and live, with your condition.

Individual programmes may differ, e.g. what exercises are used, duration of programme, amount of home exercise and how to be referred.

## Where is it held?

Some programmes are run in hospitals but many are based in the community, where it may be easier for you to attend, such as community and leisure centres or church halls.

## What are the benefits?

The benefits of PR are well documented. For example, the evidence shows that people with COPD will benefit from a PR programme and will continue to enjoy the benefits for some time after.

Lasting benefits can be maintained if you continue to keep active after the programme has finished. PR can lead to significant improvements in your quality of life and ability to exercise as well as improving symptoms such as breathlessness.

## How long does it last?

Programmes are usually 6 or 8 weeks, once or twice a week depending on where you live. You will get the most benefit by committing yourself to the whole programme.



FACTSHEET

## CHEST HEART & STROKE SCOTLAND

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**Who runs it?**

Every programme is organised and coordinated by a health professional – usually a nurse or a physiotherapist. They will be at every class and do your initial assessment.

**How will I get there?**

Your programme coordinator might be able to arrange transport for you if you need it. Your local area may have transport schemes such as Dial a Ride, TaxiCards or Volunteer Car Schemes you could apply to. If you have difficulty arranging transport please contact the CHSS Advice Line nurses for assistance.

**How will I know what I can do?**

You will have an initial assessment which will show the coordinator how well you can tolerate increased physical activity (exercise). This will be used as a baseline to show how well you improve over the weeks.

The assessment is likely to be in the form of a walking test. You will be asked to walk for a measured distance over a period of time. Your oxygen levels will be measured by pulse oximetry (a small device placed on your thumb will measure this). Your symptoms will be monitored and used as a baseline for future exercise.

**What will I actually do?**

Exercise is the core of the programme and is individually 'prescribed' for you based on your original assessment. As you progress you will gradually increase what you do.

This will involve 'endurance work', such as walking or using an exercise bike, and 'strengthening work' using other equipment, such as gentle weights, for strengthening your arms and legs. Your coordinator will supervise you closely, ensure your safety at all times and reassure you throughout.

**What should I wear?**

You should wear loose comfortable clothing and comfortable flat shoes such as trainers.

**What happens apart from exercise?**

After each exercise session there are health education talks. These cover all aspects of lung disease, from the normal functioning of your lungs and the disease process, to coping strategies such as relaxation techniques and breathing control. A multidisciplinary team of health professionals may be involved. The team may include a physiotherapist, dietician, occupational therapist, psychologist, pharmacist, social worker, specialist medical and nursing staff.

**What sort of people go?**

People of all ages and all walks of life attend PR.

## **Who is eligible for PR?**

PR should be offered to people with moderate to severe COPD. This means that you are affected by your illness enough to be aware that it is affecting your life on a daily basis. PR is not suitable if you are unable to walk, have unstable angina or have had a recent heart attack. By accepting a place you should commit yourself to completing the whole programme.

## **How do you get referred?**

If there is a class in your area you may get referred by your GP, nurse, physiotherapist or hospital consultant. Ask one of these health professionals if you think PR could help you.

## **How many people will be there?**

Classes are usually small in number. Your initial assessment will be done alone with the coordinator.

## **Can I still go if I'm breathless?**

Absolutely! One of the aims of the programme is to teach you how to manage your breathlessness and not to be afraid to be active because of it.

In COPD, you may be afraid that exercise will make you more breathless, or that breathlessness may be doing you some harm. This isn't true! By gradually building up the amount of exercise you do, you can help to improve your breathing. You will also strengthen your arms, legs, trunk and heart. This will in turn make everyday activities less tiring and less demanding of your energy. This reverses the so-called 'cycle of inactivity' where the less you do, the less you become able to do. It has been proven that working the lungs through exercise actually improves symptoms like breathlessness and energy loss.



**What if I am offered a place but don't want to go?**

It is completely voluntary to attend. However, people who have completed the course commonly report improvements in what they can do physically, coping skills and general quality of life. Many people with COPD become isolated and lose confidence but can be greatly helped by taking the help offered by the programme.

**What happens when my programme is finished?**

Those who continue to maintain their exercise regime, once PR has finished, continue to have improved outcomes. Some areas provide maintenance classes, gyms may run COPD classes or there may be walking groups or chest clubs that are exercise based that people who have completed the programme can go along to and continue what they have learned. Ask your coordinator for suggestions.

**What do people say about Pulmonary Rehab?**

*"...It was an eight week course, where I learnt about my condition, how to prevent it from getting worse and even did some exercise again. Although the exercise made me breathless I learnt how to slowly build up my muscle (strength) and improve my mood – without losing control of my breathlessness. This changed my life – I had a spring back in my step and a smile back on my face..."*

If you would like to speak to one of our nurses in confidence,  
please call the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line

**0808 801 0899**

The Advice Line is open from Monday to Friday 9.30am - 4pm.