**NUTRITION AND COPD**

Most people are surprised to learn that the food they eat may affect their breathing. Your body uses food as fuel for all of its activities. The right mix of nutrients in your diet can help you breathe easier. No single food will supply all the nutrients you need—a healthy diet has lots of variety. You and your healthcare team will work out a meal plan just for you. Meeting with a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) will help you get on track. Find an RDN who specializes in COPD by asking your doctor or visiting the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics at [EatRight.org](http://www.eatright.org/).

Be sure to mention:

* What foods you like
* What foods you don't like and won't eat
* Your daily schedule, including your exercise
* Other health problems or special dietary needs you have

**How Does Food Relate to Breathing?**

The process of changing food to fuel in the body is called metabolism. Oxygen and food are the raw materials of the process, and energy and carbon dioxide are the finished products. Carbon dioxide is a waste product that we exhale.

The right mix of nutrients in your diet can help you breathe easier.

Metabolism of carbohydrates produces the most carbon dioxide for the amount of oxygen used; metabolism of fat produces the least. For some people with COPD, eating a diet with fewer carbohydrates and more fat helps them breathe easier.

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**Nutritional Guidelines**

**Choose complex carbohydrates**, such as whole-grain bread and pasta, fresh fruits and vegetables.

* *To lose weight*: Opt for fresh fruits and veggies over bread and pasta for the majority of your complex carbohydrates.
* *To gain weight:* Eat a variety of whole-grain carbohydrates and fresh fruits and vegetables.

**Limit simple carbohydrates**, including table sugar, candy, cake and regular soft drinks.

**Eat 20 to 30 grams of fiber each day**, from items such as bread, pasta, nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetables. **Eat a good source of protein** at least twice a day to help maintain strong respiratory muscles. Good choices include milk, eggs, cheese, meat, fish, poultry, nuts and dried beans or peas.

* *To lose weight*: Choose low-fat sources of protein such as lean meats and low-fat dairy products.
* *To gain weight*: Choose protein with a higher fat content, such as whole milk, whole milk cheese and yogurt.

**Choose mono- and poly-unsaturated fats**, which do not contain cholesterol. These are fats that are often liquid at room temperature and come from plant sources, such as canola, safflower and corn oils.

* *To lose weight*: Limit your intake of these fats.
* *To gain weight*: Add these types of fats to your meals.

**Limit foods that contain trans fats and saturated fat.**For example, butter, lard, fat and skin from meat, hydrogenated vegetable oils, shortening, fried foods, cookies, crackers and pastries.

*Note: These are general nutritional guidelines for people living with COPD. Each person's needs are different, so talk to your doctor or RDN before you make changes to your diet.*

**Check Your Weight**

Get in the habit of weighing yourself regularly. The scale will alert you to weight loss or gain. You should see your doctor or dietitian if you continue to lose weight or if you gain weight while following the recommended diet. There are health complications that can result from being underweight or overweight. A well-nourished body is better able to handle infections. When people with COPD get an infection, it can become serious quickly and result in hospitalization. Good nutrition can help prevent that from happening. If illness does occur, a well-nourished body can respond better to treatment.

**Vitamins and minerals**

Many people find taking a general-purpose multivitamin helpful. Often, people with COPD take steroids. Long-term use of steroids may increase your need for calcium. Consider taking calcium supplements. Look for one that includes vitamin D. Calcium carbonate or calcium citrate are good sources of calcium. Before adding any vitamins to your daily routine, be sure to discuss with your doctor.

**Sodium**

Too much sodium may cause edema (swelling) that may increase blood pressure. If edema or high blood pressure are health problems for you, talk with your doctor about how much sodium you should be eating each day. Ask your RDN about the use of spices and herbs in seasoning your food and other ways you can decrease your sodium intake.

**Fluids**

Drinking plenty of water is important not only to keep you hydrated, but also to help keep mucus thin for easier removal. Talk with your doctor about your water intake. A good goal for many people is 6 to 8 glasses (8 fluid ounces each) daily. Don't try to drink this much fluid at once; spread it out over the entire day. Some people find it helpful to fill a water pitcher every morning with all the water they are supposed to drink in one day. They then refill their glass from that pitcher and keep track of their progress during the course of the day. Remember, any healthy caffeine-free fluid counts toward your fluid goal, and most foods contribute a substantial amount of fluid, as well.

**Using medical nutritional products**

You may find it difficult to meet your nutritional needs with regular foods, especially if you need a lot of calories every day. Also, if your RDN has suggested that you get more of your calories from fat—the polyunsaturated, monounsaturated, and low-cholesterol variety—you may not be able to meet this goal easily with ordinary foods. Your RDN or doctor may suggest you drink a liquid called a medical nutritional product (supplement). Some of these products can be used as a complete diet by people who can't eat ordinary foods, or they can be added to regular meals by people who can't eat enough food.

**Diet Hints**

* Rest just before eating.
* Eat more food early in the morning if you're usually too tired to eat later in the day.
* Avoid foods that cause gas or bloating. They tend to make breathing more difficult.
* Eat 4 to 6 small meals a day. This enables your diaphragm to move freely and lets your lungs fill with air and empty out more easily
* If drinking liquids with meals makes you feel too full to eat, limit liquids with meals; drink an hour after meals.
* Consider adding a nutritional supplement at night time to avoid feeling full during the day

**Caregivers Tip:**

Offer to help your loved one with grocery shopping or cooking. Choose foods that are easy to prepare. If you use all your energy to cook, you won't have enough left to eat.

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