

Functioning with COPD

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease



Jodage. **Breathe!** [image on intranet]. flickr; [cited 2025 Sept 2]. Available from flickr.com



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saskhealthauthority.ca

Tips for Functioning with COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder)

COPD affects people on a wide scale— from rare symptoms to difficulty with daily activities. The following ideas have helped other people with COPD manage daily activities. Suggestions may or may not be applicable to you. We are hopeful you will find something helpful for you.

Positioning for better breathing and lung expansion

- Tripod position: Sit leaning forward, resting your hands on knees to make it easier to use your breathing muscles when it is hard to breathe.
- Raise the head of the bed to a 60 to 90° angle. You can do this using pillows, large foam wedges, or with an electric adjustable bed.

Starting Your Day

- Stretch a little to limber up before you get out of bed.
- Sit on the edge of the bed while you get dressed. Consider setting out your clothes the night before.
- Use a bed rail for support, especially if the mattress sinks while you sit on it.
- If you have difficulty moving around, you may qualify for equipment (example: lifts, poles, bed rail, walkers, transfer tub seats) from SaskAbilities. Speak to an occupational therapist, physical therapist, nurse practitioner, doctor, or home care worker to learn more.



People sitting on a wooden bench. Photo by Eren Li. Pexels. Used under the Pexels License. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/photo-of-people-sitting-on-wooden-bench-7188556/>

Dressing

- Use dresser drawers that are easy to reach. Avoid drawers that make you bend down or reach up high.
- Choose front-opening bras if possible. Or, fasten bras in the front then turn them around and pull into place.
- Suspenders can be more comfortable than using a belt.

Shoes

- Sit on a chair or stool when putting on your shoes.
- Use a long handled shoe horn or a reacher.
- Choose slip-on or Velcro shoes. You can turn lace-up shoes into slip-ons using elastic shoelaces.

Grooming

- Sit down and use a mirror to shave or apply makeup.
- Use non-aerosol, unscented hypoallergenic toiletries



Shower. Image from *Wildcat.ca* [intranet image]. Flickr. Cited September 2, 2025. Available from: <https://www.flickr.com>

Bathing & hygiene

- Leave the bathroom door open to let out steam if the humidity bothers you. A heat lamp can help keep you warm while the door is open.
- Install grab bars to reduce the risk of falling.
- Use a bath stool, bath seat, tub transfer bench, or walk-in tub to sit as you shower. This helps you save energy and effort.
- Use your oxygen while bathing.
- Keep your oxygen tube out of the way by placing it over the shower curtain rod.
- Replace shower heads or bath faucets with a hand-held telephone shower head.
- It is okay to ask for help with bathing. A family member or support person may be able to help. Home Care is also available to help with bathing, and can offer other services like respite care.

Lifting and Carrying

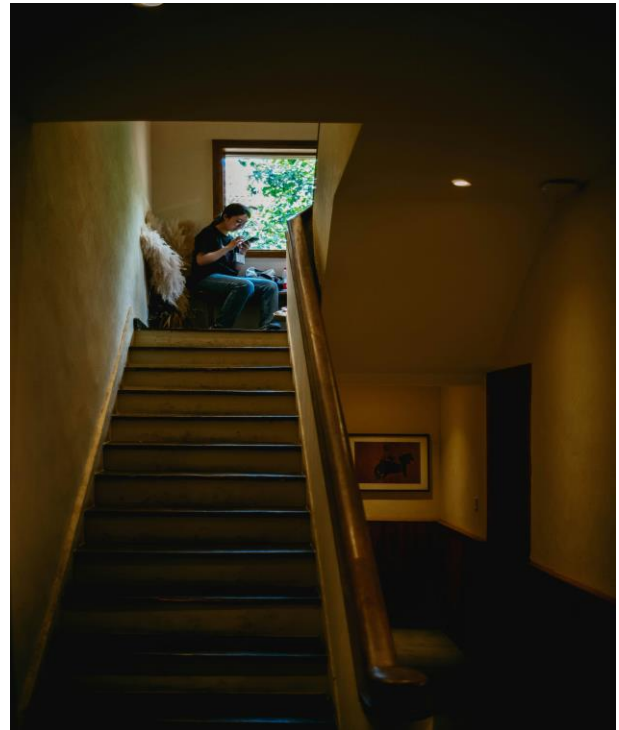
- Breathe out through pursed lips while lifting or carrying items. Breathe in through your nose. Keep this pattern of breathing going until the job is done. Take breaks as needed.
- Divide large loads into smaller loads.
- Arrange your home and work spaces to avoid reaching above your shoulders or bending below your knees or to the floor.



Man unloads produce. Photograph by *Daniel Silva* [image on intranet]. Unsplash; cited September 3, 2025. Available from: <https://unsplash.com>

Getting Around

- When using stairs step **up** with your stronger leg and step **down** with your weaker leg.
- Install stair rails on both sides of the stairway for better support and safety.
- Keep a sturdy chair or table near the top of the stairs to lean on or rest when you reach the top.
- Use a four-wheeled walker to help you move safely. Make sure it is the right size. A therapist or medical equipment vendor can help you choose one.
- Keep mobility aids (walkers, canes) on each floor so you do not have to carry them on the stairs. Keep one in your car for easy access.



Tommao Wong. **Woman on chair at top of stairs.** [image on intranet]. Unsplash; [cited 2025 Sept 3]. Available from unsplash.com

Going Out



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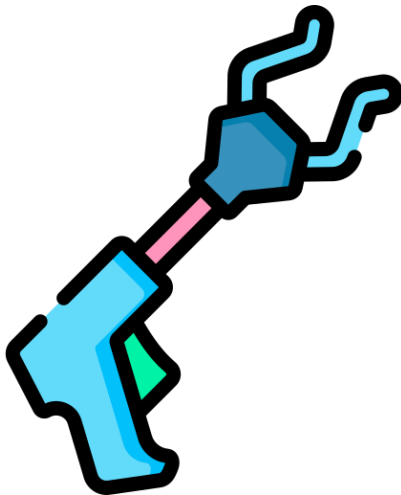
- Use hand sanitizer and a mask (if tolerated) when you are out. Wash your hands well when you get home to lower your risk of getting sick.
- Plan for short rest breaks during outings.
- Ask your healthcare provider about an accessible parking permit. If you do not drive, anyone who drives you can use it when you go places together.
- Check the daily air-quality report. Try to stay indoors on poor air-quality days.
- If you are traveling, contact the airline well ahead of time to arrange a wheelchair, oxygen, special boarding and seating.
- If you use oxygen, place it in a shopping cart or power scooter basket while you shop.
- Use elevators where available.
- Not feeling up to going out? Try grocery stores or pharmacies that deliver.

Chores

- Use a small cart or a basket (leave one on each level) to carry supplies or items that need to be put away.
- Use a reusable shopping bag to carry laundry up or down stairs. This keeps one hand free for the railing.
- Keep cleaning supplies in each area of your home so you do not need to carry them around.
- Wash small items, like socks or underwear, in a laundry bag so they are easier to get out of the washer and dryer.
- If large laundry detergent containers are hard to lift, pour detergent into smaller containers, or use detergent pods.
- Instead of standing, sit on a bar stool when working at counter height.
- Use a slightly damp cloth when dusting to help keep the dust out of the air.



Cleanliness Maid. Pixabay. Available from: <https://pixabay.com/photos/cleanliness-maid-maintains-cleaning-2799496/> . Used under the Pixabay License.



Reacher icon. Flaticon. Available from: https://www.flaticon.com/free-icon/reacher_5255841
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- Use unscented or fragrance-free cleaning products. Avoid aerosolized products.
- Tie a magnet to a string to pick up small items like pins, coins, or thumbtacks. You can stick it to your cart, fridge, or washing machine for easy access.
- Use tongs or a reacher to grab items from hard-to-reach places. You can find reachers at medical supply stores, pharmacies, or hardware stores.
- Build up garden beds so you do not have to bend or reach down as far.
- Maintain your furnace and ducts regularly. Replace furnace air filters at least every 3 months.

Learn more about COPD:



[Saskatchewan Health Authority COPD Pathway—
Information for Patients](#)

Talk to your healthcare provider to see if a [pulmonary wellness program](#) could benefit you, or if a consultation with a healthcare provider such as an *occupational therapist* or a *certified respiratory educator* could help.



Enroll in a [LiveWell Saskatchewan workshop](#)



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Healthy People, Healthy Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan Health Authority works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Saskatchewan as the traditional territory of First Nations and Métis People.

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