

Dietary Tips for Those with COPD

Eating a healthy diet can make a person with COPD feel better, gain more energy for breathing and daily activities, and fight chest infections. Here are some simple ideas to help those with COPD to get the most nutrition from meals and feel more comfortable eating:

EAT BREAKFAST! It really is the most important meal of the day: For a person with COPD, breathing burns ten times more calories than it does for a person without COPD.

- Eating larger meals early in the day when energy is highest will help a person gain the most calories and nutrients possible for the day.

Eat more nutritious foods first: Fatigue sometimes stops a person with COPD from eating before he/she gets the calories and nutrients needed.

- Eating the most nutritious foods first ensures a healthier diet, even if a meal is not entirely eaten.

Add cheese, please: Adding cheese to dishes will increase nutrients, calories, and calcium. Making sure that sufficient calcium is consumed is critical for those with COPD, whose bones can be made brittle by some prescribed medications.

- For nutrients in cheese at lower calories, look for “part-skim” or “reduced-fat” on the label.

Go for potassium: COPD patients taking a diuretic may need more potassium.

- Good options are oranges, bananas, potatoes and tomatoes.



Drink plenty of (non-caffeinated) fluids: This will help keep the mucus in the airways thin and make it easier to clear the lungs.

- At mealtimes, eat first and sip later to get a solid, nutritious meal before feeling full.

Eat smaller, more frequent meals that are high in calories: This technique can help a person with COPD meet daily caloric needs more efficiently.

- Eating smaller, more frequent meals can also help a person feel less full, making it easier to breathe.
- If underweight, avoid low-fat or low-calorie food products and supplement meals with high-calorie snacks like pudding or crackers with peanut butter.

Include enough fiber in the diet: High fiber foods such as vegetables, dried legumes, bran, whole grains, rice, cereals, pasta and fresh fruit aid in digestion by helping food move more easily through the digestive tract.

- Daily fiber requirements should be between 20 to 35 grams of fiber.

Choose foods that are easy to prepare or ask for help with meal preparation:

Preparing meals sometimes uses up so much energy that a person with COPD then doesn't have enough energy to eat the meal.

- Instead, have a family member, friend or a home care agency such as Continuum help with grocery shopping and/or meal preparation.

Avoid caffeine: Caffeine can interfere with some medicines and may cause nervousness and restlessness, which can exacerbate COPD symptoms.

Avoid/limit salt: Sodium can cause water retention, which makes it harder to breathe, so it is best to avoid foods that have more than 300 milligrams of sodium per serving.

- Be aware that salt substitutes that taste salty generally contain other forms of salt that can be harmful.
- No-salt spices including garlic, oregano, basil, curry, onion, parsley, rosemary and lemon juice are all good alternatives.

Avoid gas-inducing foods: Foods that cause gas or bloating can make it feel harder to breathe.

- Common culprits include carbonated beverages, greasy fried foods, heavily spiced foods, beans, and vegetables like cabbage and broccoli.

Wear an oxygen cannula while eating: If the doctor has prescribed continuous oxygen therapy, make sure to wear the oxygen cannula when eating.

- Since the body requires extra energy to eat and digest food, the additional oxygen will help.

Continuum understands the dietary needs of those with COPD, and can assist with symptom management at home. Call Continuum today to learn more about the ways in-home care can help people with COPD breathe easier.

Sources: WebMD, About.com