



EATING WELL AND  
CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE  
PULMONARY DISEASE



# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE WITH COPD TO EAT WELL?

Eating a healthy, balanced diet is vital for maintaining good health.

COPD can have an effect on the whole body and, if the person you care for has COPD, it is more important than ever that they eat well.

Eating a balanced and varied diet is important for people with COPD and can help them to:

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Preserve strength and fitness.
- Fight infections.

As a carer you want the best for the person you look after, including ensuring they eat and drink well.

There are some simple ways that can help a person with COPD to enjoy healthy, balanced meals and get the best from their diet.

This booklet is for anyone caring for a person with COPD and provides useful information and tips on how to help them eat well.

# WHAT IS CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD)?

Chronic	long term
Obstructive	partially blocked
Pulmonary	lung
Disease	or illness

COPD is the name used to describe a number of lung related conditions, including chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

COPD causes damage to the airways, resulting in them becoming narrower and making it harder for air to get in and out of the lungs. This is called airflow (breathing) obstruction.

COPD is a chronic, or long term, condition. Therefore the airflow obstruction is permanent or 'irreversible'.

COPD mostly affects the lungs but also has an impact on the rest of the body.

Some common symptoms of COPD include:

- Shortness of breath, called dyspnoea, and an increased effort to breathe.
- Increased mucus production and frequent clearing of the throat.
- Chronic cough and chest tightness.
- Wheeze.
- Frequent chest infections, particularly in winter.
- Anxiety and sometimes depression, often due to breathlessness.
- Reduced physical fitness and muscle strength.
- Weight loss and changes in body composition.

# HOW CAN COPD AFFECT DIET AND NUTRITION?

For people with COPD, maintaining a healthy weight is important. If people with COPD are very overweight, the heart and lungs have to work harder to supply oxygen to the body. Likewise, being too thin means they are more at risk of infection.

## MONITOR WEIGHT

Your doctor can help you to work out what a healthy weight should be. As a carer, you may be the first to notice if someone with COPD begins to lose or gain weight. If you are concerned about someone's weight, encourage them to seek advice from their doctor or nurse.

## WEIGHT LOSS

People with COPD may struggle to eat enough and begin to lose weight. They may also notice they are losing strength in their muscles or that their body shape is changing. Be aware of visual signs of weight loss, for example jewellery and clothes becoming looser. Some of the causes of weight loss in people with COPD are:

- **Poor appetite** – you may have noticed the person you care for has less interest in food. This may be for several reasons. When people with COPD are unwell or have a chest infection, this can affect appetite. They may also find they are feeling full from only small amounts of food. Some people also experience changes in the way food tastes, which can affect their appetite.



- **Shortness of breath** – chewing and swallowing can make it feel more difficult for someone with shortness of breath to breathe. As a result, they may begin to eat less, or very slowly.
- **Tiredness** – some people with COPD may feel that they do not have enough energy to shop, cook or prepare their own meals. They may skip meals or rely on convenient options instead.
- **Increased energy needs** – people with COPD often need to eat more than someone without COPD because their body has to work harder to breathe and fight infections.
- **Dry mouth** – some treatments for COPD, including oxygen, nebulisers and inhalers, can cause a dry mouth. This can make chewing and swallowing more difficult and can sometimes lead to taste changes, all of which can make food less appealing.

## **WEIGHT GAIN**

People with COPD who are very overweight may become more short of breath during activities, such as walking up stairs or carrying the groceries.

Carrying additional body weight also increases the risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.

Some medication taken for COPD, such as steroids, may cause an increase in appetite and result in a person eating more than usual. This may lead to weight gain and can be a concern if it causes the person you care for to become very overweight.

# EATING WELL FOR PEOPLE WITH COPD

Eating a healthy, balanced diet is vital for maintaining good health. This includes eating foods from all of the different food groups, to provide the body with the nutrients it needs. If you are involved in preparing meals for someone with COPD, use the following as a guide to help you.

## PROTEIN

Proteins are the body's building blocks and are essential for growth and repair. Protein helps us to maintain our muscle mass, including those muscles that help with breathing.

- Foods that provide us with protein include: meat, fish, eggs, dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt), tofu, beans, lentils.
- Try to include a portion of protein with at least two meals during the day, e.g. lunch and dinner.

## STARCHY FOODS

Starchy foods are an excellent source of energy.

- Starchy foods include: potatoes, bread, pasta, rice, cereals.
- Always include a starchy food at each meal.
- Try to choose wholegrain varieties as these are a good source of fibre too.

## FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Fruits and vegetables are an important source of vitamins and minerals, which help support your immune system.

- Aim to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.
- You can use fresh, frozen, or canned – they all count.

## DAIRY FOODS

People with COPD sometimes have weaker bones as a result of medications or because they are less active. Dairy foods contain protein and calcium, which help to maintain normal bones.

- Dairy foods include: cheese, milk, yogurt, fromage frais, custard.
- Aim to include a helping of dairy food in the diet three times per day.
- If the person you are caring for is underweight or needs to gain weight, opt for full fat or high energy options. If they are overweight and weight loss is a goal stick to low fat or skimmed options.

## HIGH ENERGY FOODS

- High energy foods are those that are high in fat (e.g. chips, fried foods, meat pies), high in sugar (e.g. fizzy drinks, sweets), or high in both sugar and fat (e.g. chocolate, cream cakes).
- These foods may be helpful if the person you care for is trying to gain weight and should be included as part of a healthy diet.
- However, if the person you care for is trying to lose weight, encourage them to cut back on these foods.

# TIPS TO ENCOURAGE EATING

When someone with COPD is struggling to eat enough to get the energy and nutrients they need to maintain their weight and strength, the following tips may help to increase their appetite and overcome symptoms.

## POOR APPETITE

- Encourage a little and often approach – offer small meals and snacks frequently throughout the day, rather than three large meals.
- Try not to overload the plate with too much food and have a gap between the main meal and dessert.
- Be flexible with mealtimes and make the most of ‘good eating times’ – different people will have more of an appetite at certain times of the day, whether this is at breakfast or teatime.
- Ensure there are some convenient foods on standby in the freezer or cupboard for quick and easy meals. Good cupboard ideas include: long life milk, savoury snacks, biscuits, rice puddings, corned beef, baked beans, macaroni cheese, soups, tinned puddings, custard.



## COPING WITH A DRY MOUTH

- Offer softer foods or moist foods, e.g. choose minced beef rather than individual pieces of meat, and provide plenty of sauce or gravy.
- Suggest the person you care for sucks on fruit sweets, or ice cubes made with fruit juice. Chewing on sugar free gum can also help to stimulate saliva production.
- If a dry mouth is causing soreness or problems with eating encourage the person you care for to speak to their doctor or nurse. Products that help people produce saliva are available on prescription.
- If you notice increased difficulty swallowing or frequent coughing during meals, encourage the person you care for to speak with their doctor or nurse.

## COPING WITH TASTE CHANGES

- Encourage regular mouth care including cleaning teeth/dentures, using a mouthwash and flossing.
- Suggest trying new foods, including sharp or spicy foods, which have a stronger taste, or different seasonings and sauces.
- If the person you care for has 'gone off' a particular food, encourage them to try it again after a couple of weeks.

# TIPS FOR GAINING WEIGHT OR IMPROVING NUTRITIONAL INTAKE

If you are involved in preparing and cooking meals for someone with COPD, here are some practical ways to help improve their nutritional intake.

- Always choose full fat or high energy options, e.g. whole milk and butter.
- Make fortified milk by whisking 2-4 tablespoons of milk powder into one pint of milk; use this in place of regular milk and add to drinks, puddings, cereals, soups and sauces.
- Add grated cheese to foods such as mashed potato, scrambled eggs and baked beans.
- Add cream to sauces, soups, desserts, cereals and porridge.
- Use mayonnaise, avocado or dressing in sandwiches and on salads.
- Add extra butter or margarine to vegetables, potatoes, scrambled eggs and bread.
- Add extra honey, syrup and jams into foods such as porridge.
- Consume nourishing drinks based on milk, such as Complan, to increase energy and protein intake. These are also available as 'ready to drink' options, which are convenient at home or out and about.

# TIPS FOR LOSING WEIGHT AND EATING A BALANCED DIET

A small amount of weight gain is OK but too much weight gain, or being very overweight, may be a concern. The following tips can help a person with COPD manage or lose weight:

- Replace high fat and sugary snacks with healthier alternatives, such as nuts, fresh or dried fruit, cereal bars or wholegrain crackers.
- Modify recipes to include low fat ingredients, such as lean cuts of meat, chicken breast without the skin and low fat dairy options.
- Include vegetables with both lunch and dinner – they are high in fibre to help us feel full and will also provide lots of important vitamins and minerals.
- Watch portion sizes and suggest serving food on a smaller plate – sometimes our eyes are bigger than our stomachs!
- Encourage everything in moderation – there is no need to cut out any food group, as long as you control portions.

# WHAT HAPPENS IF FOOD IS NOT ENOUGH?

Eating a healthy, balanced diet plays a key role in keeping the body strong. Living with COPD can put a strain on the body. It can be hard to get enough food at these times, which can weaken the body further.

## WHAT IS MEDICAL NUTRITION?

Medical nutrition products are specialised foods designed to meet the nutritional needs of those living with a medical condition, recovering from an illness or operation, or those who have become weak and frail over time. They are often referred to as Oral Nutritional Supplements (ONS) and are typically used for those who find it difficult to get adequate nutrition from a normal diet alone.

The nutritional composition of ONS is based on extensive scientific and clinical research, and in many cases its use is recommended in international and professional guidelines. Products are generally available in the form of a powder or liquid drink containing energy, protein, vitamins and minerals.

Medical nutrition products are usually only available on prescription and they must be used under the medical supervision of a healthcare professional.

## WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ORAL NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS AVAILABLE

ONS are available in a variety of formats and styles, including milkshake-, juice-, yogurt-, and dessert-style, as well as a variety of flavours to suit different taste preferences.

**High protein, nutrient-dense, low volume** ONS are sometimes recommended for those who are unwell or are recovering from illness. These milkshake style drinks can help make it easier to get the energy and nutrients needed, even if the person you care for has a small appetite or is not feeling well. Many people find it difficult to finish large volumes of drinks and a low volume ONS may be preferred in these cases.

If you have any questions about the use of medical nutrition products, please speak to your healthcare professional. Further information can be found at [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org) or by calling the Nutricia Resource Centre on 0845 250 1011.

## SPEAK TO THEIR GP

If you are worried the person you are caring for is struggling with a normal diet, the practical tips within this leaflet can help improve nutritional intake with food. You could also ask their pharmacist whether an over the counter product in a powdered format, such as Complan, is a suitable option alongside normal foods and drinks. However, should the person you are caring for continue to struggle, please speak to their GP or other healthcare professional about your concerns and whether medical nutrition is right for them.

Further information can be found at [www.carersuk.org/nutrition](http://www.carersuk.org/nutrition) or by calling the Nutricia helpline on 0845 250 1011.



# ABOUT CARERS UK

## HOWEVER CARING AFFECTS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY, WE'RE HERE

As the UK's only national membership charity for carers, we're a supportive community and a movement for change.

We give expert advice, information and support.

We connect carers so no one has to care alone.

We campaign together for lasting change.

We innovate to find new ways to reach and support carers.

Visit our website to join us, support us or get information and advice on caring:

**[www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)**

Carers UK Helpline: **0808 808 7777**

(Monday to Friday, 9am-6pm)

**[advice@carersuk.org](mailto:advice@carersuk.org)**

# ABOUT NUTRICIA

Nutricia Ltd specialises in the delivery of medical nutrition products and services for all who need it, spanning from the very young to the elderly. We supply high quality feeds, equipment and support services to patients and healthcare professionals. Through our Nutricia Homeward service we deliver feeds, feeding pumps, equipment and nursing care direct to patients' homes.



Carers UK is working in partnership with Nutricia Ltd to help improve understanding about nutrition and caring. The partnership provides carers with information and resources on nutritional care for both themselves and the person they care for.

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Carers UK includes Carers Wales, Carers Scotland and Carers NI — visit our website to find out more and get in touch: [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org).

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