

COPD: How to Clear Your Lungs



When you have COPD, you may have too much mucus in your lungs. Learning to clear your lungs may help you save energy and oxygen. It may also help prevent lung infections.

There are three ways to clear your lungs:

- Chest percussion
- Controlled coughing
- Postural drainage

Chest percussion

To loosen the mucus in your lungs, cup your hand and lightly tap your chest and back. Ask your doctor where the best spots are to do this. Avoid your spine and breastbone. It may be easier to have someone do the tapping for you.

Controlled coughing

Coughing is how your body tries to get rid of mucus. But the kind of coughing you cannot control makes things worse. It causes your airways to collapse and traps the mucus in your lungs.

Controlled coughing comes from deep in your lungs. It loosens mucus and moves it through your airways. It is best to do it after you use your inhaler or other medicine. Follow these steps for controlled coughing:

- Sit on the edge of a chair, and keep both feet on the floor.
- Lean forward a little, and relax.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose, and fold your arms over your belly.
- As you exhale, lean forward. Push your arms against your belly.
- Cough 2 or 3 times as you exhale with your mouth slightly open. Make the coughs short and sharp. Push on your belly with your arms as you cough. The first cough brings the mucus through the lung airways. The next two coughs bring it up and out.
- Inhale again, but do it slowly and gently through your nose. Do not take quick or deep breaths through your mouth. It can block the mucus coming out of the lungs. It also can cause uncontrolled coughing.
- Rest, and repeat if you need to.

Postural drainage

Lying in different positions can help you drain mucus from your lungs. You can do it on a bed or the floor. Use pillows to help you with different positions.

Hold each position for 5 minutes. Do it about 30 minutes after you use your inhaler. Make sure you have an empty stomach. If you need to cough, sit up and do controlled coughing.

- **Drain the front of your lungs** by lying on your back. Make sure your chest is lower than your hips. Put two pillows under your knees with your legs bent over the pillows. Use a small pillow under your head. Keep your arms at your sides. Then, follow these instructions for breathing:

- With one hand on your belly and the other on your chest, breathe in.
- Push your belly out as far as possible. You should be able to feel the hand on your belly move out, while the hand on your chest should not move. When you breathe out, you should be able to feel the hand on your belly move in. This is called diaphragmatic breathing. You will use it in the other drainage positions, too.
- **Drain the sides of your lungs** by lying on each side. Place two or three pillows under your hips. Use a small pillow under your head. Make sure your chest is lower than your hips. Use diaphragmatic breathing. After 5 or 10 minutes, switch sides.
- **Drain the back of your lungs** by lying on your stomach. Place two or three pillows under your hips. Use a small pillow under your head. Kneel over the pillows. Place your arms by your head. Use diaphragmatic breathing.