



# Cardiorespiratory conditions

Enhance your health with a physiotherapist

Cardiorespiratory refers to the heart (cardio) and the lungs (respiratory), which work together to transport oxygen throughout the body. Cardiorespiratory fitness, also called aerobic capacity, is the ability of the lungs, heart and circulatory system to supply your body with the oxygen it needs to maintain a physically active lifestyle.

Cardiorespiratory conditions can restrict your ability to breathe in enough air and deliver enough oxygen to your body when needed—leaving you coughing or wheezing and short of breath. Conditions that limit your cardiorespiratory function can affect your strength, vitality and sense of wellbeing. Responding to these limitations by reducing your physical activity only worsens the situation and reduces your overall fitness level.

*Physiotherapists are skilled in helping people who are coping with acute or chronic respiratory or cardiovascular conditions by improving the function and capacity of their cardiorespiratory system.<sup>1,2</sup>*

*Performing an assessment and discussing your goals helps your physiotherapist create a therapeutic plan as individual as your needs. Your program may include training in specific breathing and secretion clearance techniques, resistance training, endurance exercises and a specific exercise prescription—all of these can help you feel better and get more out of life.*

## Benefits in specific conditions

### Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

Flare ups (*exacerbations*) of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are serious events that can result in hospitalization and worsen your lung function.<sup>3</sup> Studies have shown that pulmonary rehabilitation can promote your recovery and decrease your risk of future exacerbations.<sup>3,4</sup> Exercise training can reduce breathlessness, improve the strength of your arms and legs, and increase your activity tolerance or endurance.<sup>4</sup> Your physiotherapist can

work with you to develop a program to improve your control of COPD and increase your health-related quality of life.<sup>4,5</sup> Better control can help you manage daily tasks and enjoy activities with your friends and family—today and in the future.

### Cystic fibrosis

Chest physiotherapy is the recognized standard of care to improve the effectiveness of the cough and help people with cystic fibrosis keep their lungs clear.<sup>6,7</sup> Techniques to help you clear secretions may include chest percussion, postural drainage, and use of positive expiratory

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pressure. Studies have also shown that exercise can reduce physical limitations associated with cystic fibrosis, and that adding an exercise program to chest physiotherapy can further improve breathing.<sup>8,9</sup> Your physiotherapist can create a combined program to improve your breathing, cardiorespiratory fitness and overall functioning. Improving your health and fitness with physiotherapy can support you in living well and feeling better.

### Surgery

Following major surgery on your abdomen, heart or lungs, you will often experience some build-up of secretions in your lungs and a reluctance to take deep breaths. Your physiotherapist will guide you in

performing various techniques to clear these secretions and enable you to breathe more effectively in order to get oxygen to your body. You may also find that you become more fatigued following surgery. Your physiotherapist can design a program to help you improve your overall physical and cardiorespiratory fitness after surgery and help you get back to living your normal life.

**Ask a physiotherapist. No referral required.**

Learn more at [www.physiotherapy.ca](http://www.physiotherapy.ca) or call 1-800-387-8679.

### References

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## About physiotherapy and physiotherapists

Physiotherapy is the primary healthcare profession that promotes wellness, mobility and independent function. University education, clinical and professional training provides physiotherapists with the knowledge they need to help people of all ages and abilities to improve their level of physical function. With a thorough understanding of the human body in good health and in both chronic and acute disease, advanced skills in physical assessment, and experience in hands-on care, physiotherapists manage a broad range of medical and surgical conditions.

Physiotherapists can help you increase your mobility, relieve your pain, build your strength, improve your balance, and increase your cardiovascular fitness.