CYSTIC FIBROSIS AND EXERCISE

How does cystic fibrosis affect me?

Cystic fibrosis is an inherited condition that primarily affects the respiratory and digestive systems. In the lungs, the secretion of thick and sticky mucus can clog up the airways. The clogged mucus increases the chance of infections. It also can also cause shortness of breath and damage to the lungs. CF can obstruct the digestive system and prevent the pancreas from working properly to allow the body to absorb food and nutrients. This can cause poor growth and prevent normal weight gain as children grow. It can also cause weak bones.

Why do I need to exercises?

Exercise is very important for good health. It helps you feel better! It helps build muscles and strong bones and helps strengthen the lungs. It helps increase self-image and allows children, teens and adults to participate in activities at school, with family and in the community and at work. It helps clear mucus and increase lung function and decreases the rate of lung function decline. Regular physical and breathing exercises along with the use of antibiotics and lung care can help prevent, relieve or control breathing problems. It is very important that you and your family understand that exercise will help you manage your CF and stay as healthy as possible.

How does regular physical exercise and activity help me?

A physically fit body is strong and flexible. Children, teens and adults who exercise do better than those who don’t. The limits that CF may put on you will be worse if you are not active. When you are fit the body uses oxygen more efficiently, so less is needed to do an activity. Exercise helps keep the heart and lungs strong. A physically fit body is also able to resist or fight infections better and may result in fewer or shorter hospital stays. In addition the exercise will help loosen mucus in the airways so it can be coughed up easier.

How do breathing exercises help?

Breathing exercises are very important in managing CF and should be practiced regularly. Diaphragmatic breathing is a way of breathing that uses the diaphragm muscle to do the work. The diaphragm is shaped like a dome and is between your lungs and your abdomen. It is the strongest and most effective muscle you have for breathing. During most activities, this should be the main muscle doing the work of breathing. Accessory muscles are in your neck, shoulders, and chest. They help the diaphragm, but they take more energy to use. If your diaphragm is weak the accessory muscles work too hard and make you tired and
short of breath faster. Breathing exercises help strengthen the diaphragm and help you breathe more efficiently. Breathing exercises help clear mucus out of the lungs.

**What type of exercise should I do?**

To be successful at an exercise program, it needs to be fun and enjoyable! Cardiovascular and strengthening exercise is very beneficial for people with CF. Everyone can benefit from most sports such as running, swimming, bicycling, hiking, skating, T-ball, baseball, basketball, soccer, yoga, Pilates, dancing, gymnastics, join a Gym, etc. Be sure to discuss the types of exercise you want to do with your doctor. Choose an activity that will keep you moving for 15 to 30 minutes at a time. Start out slow and gradually increase your exercise program. Your doctor may refer you to Physical and Occupational Therapy to get you set up on a specific exercise program and to help you choose the type of exercise that is best for you. Having an exercise partner or joining groups can help you stay motivated and have a more enjoyable time. Doing family activities are one of the best ways to feel good, and stay fit involving all members of your family.

**Safety!**

As with all exercise, you should discuss the types and intensity of the activities that you are interested in with your doctor and Therapist. Start out in moderation and increase slowly. Be sure to wear appropriate clothing and shoes for your activity and wear the proper safety gear required for each sport or activity. People with CF don’t handle heat stress well and need to replace fluids during exercise. Choose drinks such as sport drinks that replace electrolytes. Additional nutritional supplements are also needed to increase calories and protein to keep your weight and energy level up. You can also contact your dietitian and respiratory therapist for more information.

Most of all be safe and enjoy yourself!

**For more information about exercise and fitness contact:**

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler
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Tyler, TX 75708
903-877-7293

**Resources:**
Cystic Fibrosis Foundation
Cff.org