

Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis

How the community health team can help

Having support from a team of different health professionals can help to make things easier, consider involving the below to help:

- Physiotherapists
- Occupational Therapists
- Social Workers
- Dietitians
- Clinical psychologists

Physiotherapists:

Physiotherapists can provide assessment, treatment, advice, and a self-care plan in home situations.

Physiotherapists can teach you the secrets to better breathing and can provide rehabilitation so that you can get back on your feet, exercising more often and with greater confidence.

Learning to breathe in the most efficient manner, using a technique call 'diaphragmatic breathing' or sometimes referred to as 'easy breathing', can help make breathing easier. Practice this new technique and use it in activities until it becomes second nature. Learn to relax; restful positions encourage easy breathing. Relaxation keeps the body loose and calm. Plan to exercise regularly; as fitness increases or is maintained, breathing and activities may become a little easier.

Your physiotherapist can help you to understand breathing and the function of the lungs. The lungs are two cone shaped sponges, with a narrow top and wide base. They lie within an airtight cage formed by the ribs, the breastbone, the spine, and the muscle of the diaphragm. The lower chest is much wider and roomier than the upper chest and hence the lungs can soak up more air when you breathe into the lower chest than if you breathe only into the smaller area of the upper chest. Also, over reliance on upper chest muscles can result in more oxygen being consumed than is gained.

Occupational Therapists:

An Occupational Therapist can help you achieve more by doing less. Prioritising daily activities ensures that the most important things are done within your abilities. Simplifying tasks and conserving energy will help you to achieve more. Make a list or timetable, considering monthly or yearly chores. It is important to pace daily activities to avoid unnecessary breathlessness. Slowing down may take a conscious effort. Reduce effort by having an organised home, where everything is easily reached and walking is minimised. Consider items used daily and where they are placed, e.g. the telephone.

Work at tasks at a comfortable height level and consider sitting to do chores like ironing or peeling vegetables.

A home environment with some changes, may make life easier. Use a shower stool or bath board, hand rails, and a household trolley for moving objects around the home. Increase the height of chairs and your bed to decrease effort in standing. Use an extend-a-hand tool to eliminate bending.

Social Workers:

Social workers are experienced in giving support and survival techniques, with advice on benefits, funding for special needs, and helping sufferers and their carers to cope from day to day. They can discuss options and possibilities for your needs and make referrals to suitable community contacts, support and volunteers. **Most of all they listen to needs and link ideas and possibilities to make it easier to cope with daily living.**

Dietitians:

Dietitians can make suggestions on eating well and comfortably with breathing conditions. It may be necessary to avoid large meals, and dieticians can provide invaluable advice on the preparation of smaller meals, snacks, and supplements to increase energy sources. **When short of breath there is an actual need to eat high calorie foods, to provide the energy needed to breathe.**

Clinical Psychologists:

Living with breathlessness can affect emotions in many ways. It is understandable that panic attacks, anxiety, and depression are unpleasant emotions, but action can be taken to ease them. Clinical psychologists help people with medical problems address issues such as mood or anxiety.