What is pulmonary rehabilitation?
Pulmonary rehabilitation is a comprehensive program for people with a chronic lung disease who have symptoms of breathlessness and a decreased ability to perform the activities of daily life. Programs are individually tailored and designed to optimise physical and social wellbeing. Pulmonary rehabilitation programs have been shown to help people breathe easier, improve their quality of life and stay out of hospital. After completing pulmonary rehabilitation many patients find that they can resume activities that they had previously given up.

What are the expected benefits?
Following pulmonary rehabilitation, most people report that they are able to do more in their daily activities, and are less out of breath during the tasks.

Some of the many benefits of pulmonary rehabilitation include:
- Increased physical fitness & functioning
- Reduced breathlessness
- Improved quality of life
- Improved mood and motivation
- Improved knowledge of lung condition
- Improved ability to manage lung condition
- Increased participation in everyday activities
- Reduced hospital admissions
- Reduced length of stay in hospital

Who attends pulmonary rehabilitation?
In general, pulmonary rehabilitation programs are suitable for people who have a chronic lung disease and who are limited by breathlessness. Partners or caregivers are also encouraged to attend the education sessions.

What does the program consist of?
The program consists of an individual assessment followed by exercise training and education. Typically programs run for at least 6-8 weeks with 2 exercise sessions per week, and an education component attached. The exercise component focuses on increasing your physical function, whilst the education component will assist you in managing your condition, by providing knowledge in such areas as breathing techniques, using your medicines and energy conservation. At the end of the program, there is a re-assessment and by this point, there will be an agreed plan in place of how you will be able to maintain the benefits gained during the program.

What’s involved in the exercise?
Your exercise program will be prescribed based on your results from the initial assessment and the goals you want to achieve. The physiotherapist or exercise physiologist will recommend the intensity, duration, frequency and type of exercise you should do. Normally each exercise session will consist of a warm-up followed by some aerobic exercise, some strengthening exercises for your arms and legs and a cool down. The aerobic exercise may include walking, cycling or stepping. Walking is a really important element, as many aspects of daily life involve walking. Your exercise may be continuous or in an interval format. Intervals mean that you can stop and rest to recover during the exercise. Over the weeks, your exercises will be progressed as you get fitter and stronger. You will not be...
asked to do anything that you are not comfortable with. Most participants are surprised and pleased at how much more they are able to do over the weeks. Once you are confident to exercise you will be given a home exercise program to do on the other days of the week when you are not at pulmonary rehabilitation.

I find exercise really hard, why will doing more help me?

Often, if you get breathless during activity you will avoid exercise. Consequently, your muscles get weaker and you decondition over time. This means that when you do need to be active you get even more breathless. Exercise training is an essential part of the pulmonary rehabilitation as it can help to reverse this “cycle of inactivity and breathlessness”. Clinical trials have consistently shown that an improvement in exercise tolerance is one of the main benefits of completing a pulmonary rehabilitation program. Improved exercise tolerance means activities such as showering, walking or gardening may become easier after completing this program, which leads to an improved quality of life and greater independence.

What topics are there in the education sessions?
The education component of each pulmonary rehabilitation program is different. Some of the topics may include:

1. Medicines – what they do and how to use them.
2. Breathing techniques/ managing breathlessness
3. Sputum clearance
4. Benefits of physical exercise
5. Oxygen therapy
6. Energy conservation techniques
7. Nutrition/ healthy eating
8. Information on how the lungs work
9. Coping with chronic lung disease and management of depression, anxiety and panic attacks

Will it be safe for me to attend?

Yes. Pulmonary rehabilitation is very safe. Once you have medical clearance for exercise, the assessment and individualised prescribed exercise program ensures you are exercising at a safe level that is appropriate for your current health status.

What happens when I’ve finished Pulmonary Rehabilitation?

At the completion of pulmonary rehabilitation you will be encouraged to continue exercising at home, so that you maintain the benefits you gained from the program. If you find it difficult to motivate yourself or would enjoy some company as you exercise, you may prefer to join a suitable community-based group exercise program.

Lungs in Action is Lung Foundation Australia’s community based exercise maintenance program that is for people with stable chronic lung conditions who have completed Pulmonary Rehabilitation. These safe and social classes are run by specially trained instructors and take place in venues such as community halls, RSL clubs and gyms.

How do I enrol?
The criteria to enrol in a pulmonary rehabilitation program will vary among centres. Lung Foundation Australia holds a data base of all the known programs in the country and will be able to advise you on an appropriately located program. You should also discuss the benefits of enrolling in a pulmonary rehabilitation program with your specialist lung doctor, GP, physiotherapist or respiratory nurse.

To find out more information about pulmonary rehabilitation, or to find your nearest location call Lung Foundation Australia on toll free 1800 654 301.

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