

# Nutrition and COPD

Eating Well with COPD



[www.copdfoundation.org](http://www.copdfoundation.org)

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# COPD <sup>AND</sup> NUTRITION

Eating a well-balanced diet is important for everyone—it's especially important if you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). With COPD, your body needs more energy to do the work of breathing. In this guide, you will learn more about how your diet can affect your COPD and how to choose foods that can help you manage your condition.



*Before you change your diet, be sure to check with your health care provider first!*

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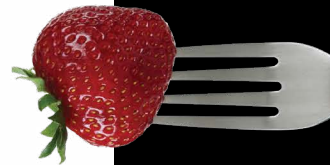
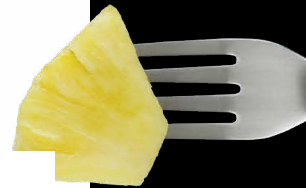
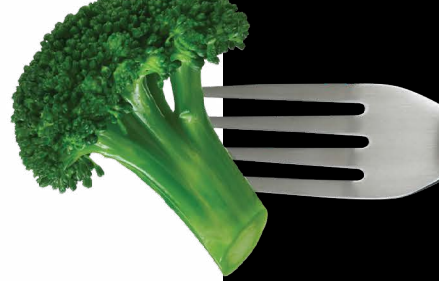
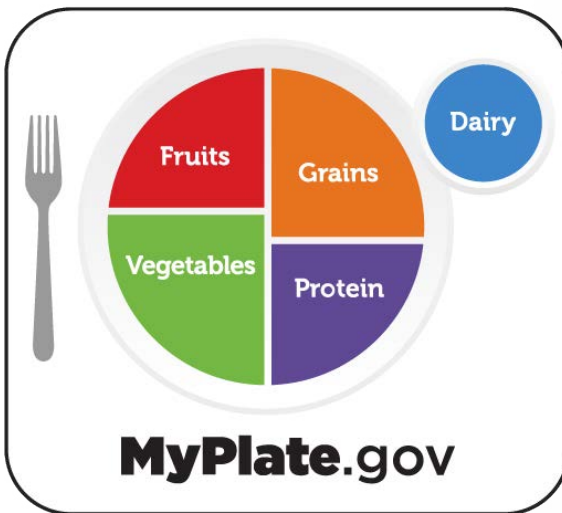
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# EATING WELL IS A BALANCE

A healthy diet includes options from all of the main food groups. Choose items that are low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt, and added sugar. Some healthy choices include:

- Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese.
- Lean meats, poultry (chicken and turkey), and fish. Some fish, such as salmon and sardines, are also rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which are important healthy fats.
- Beans, eggs, tofu or other plant-based protein, and nuts.





# WHY <sup>ARE</sup> CALORIES IMPORTANT?

Calories are the fuel that help your body work. How many calories a person needs each day depends on factors such as age, disease condition, how much they exercise, and if they need to lose or gain weight.

## What's a Normal Weight for You?

Ask your health care provider about what your weight should be. Maintaining a healthy weight is important for COPD and for many conditions such as diabetes, heart problems, and high blood pressure. Being overweight or underweight can affect your COPD.



# IF YOU WEIGH LESS THAN YOU SHOULD

COPD can increase your chance of being underweight. People with COPD need extra calories each day just to breathe. Being underweight can worsen COPD. If you are underweight, you should increase the number of calories you eat each day.

## To add more calories to your diet:

- Add olive oil or peanut butter to your foods.
- Try healthy smoothies, protein supplements, and egg substitutes.
- Snack on nutritious, high-calorie foods such as nuts, olives, and dried fruit.
- Use honey or date syrup to sweeten your food and drinks.
- Add flaxseed oil or olive oil to cottage cheese or non-dairy cottage cheese with fruit.

*When adding more calories to your diet, use small amounts at first so that you aren't taking in too many extra calories.*

*Before trying new foods or supplements, check with your doctor. Some foods and supplements may increase blood pressure or blood sugar. Some also interact with medications such as blood thinners and can be potentially dangerous.*





## Other Causes of Weight Loss

Unplanned weight loss affects as many as 40 to 70 percent of people with COPD. Some people with COPD lose weight because they don't have an appetite. Others feel bloated from swallowing air when they eat. Certain medications can cause an upset stomach or loss of appetite, too. Anxiety and loss of muscle mass can also cause unexpected weight loss. It's important to eat a balanced diet so you don't lose weight by accident.

### To improve your appetite:

- Relax, slow down, and enjoy your meal.
- Eat small, healthy snacks throughout the day.
- When you know you should eat but are not hungry, eat some of your favorite foods.







## IF YOU WEIGH MORE THAN <sup>YOU</sup> SHOULD

The best way to lose weight is to make small, healthy changes. Extreme dieting is not healthy and can be hard to maintain.

- Try eating fewer calories and smaller meals every few hours and drink plenty of water between meals.
- Limit fast food and regular or diet sodas. Even diet sodas have been linked to obesity and diabetes.
- Avoid fried foods, creamy salad dressings, and sauces. Try making your own dressings with olive oil and vinegar or lemon juice instead.
- Eat less candy and fewer sweets and limit your alcohol intake to one glass of wine per day. Some wines, such as red wine, have antioxidants that may benefit some people in small amounts; but alcohol is also high in calories and can affect your blood pressure and interact with some medications.

*People with COPD who take corticosteroids may find that the medicine makes them hungrier than normal. This can lead to unexpected weight gain. Talk to your doctor if you experience this side effect.*

# EATING TIPS<sup>FOR</sup> ANYBODY WITH COPD



## To make foods easier to chew:

- Mince or grind meats.
- Eat soft foods such as mashed potatoes, casseroles, and well-cooked vegetables.
- Try healthy fruit smoothies or milk shakes. Many can be made with non-dairy, plant-based “milks.”

## To decrease shortness of breath and reduce tiredness:

- Rest for 30 minutes before and after meals.
- Use pursed lip breathing and sit upright while eating.
- If you use oxygen, ask your health care provider if you should increase your flow rate during meals. Do not adjust your oxygen flow without asking first.
- Use meal services or ask for help with cooking.
- Limit sweets. They can cause you to feel more tired.

## To reduce bloating:

- Do not eat when you are short of breath.
- Drink fluids one hour before and one hour after a meal.
- Avoid gas-producing foods such as cabbage, broccoli, and carbonated drinks.
- Eat less fried food.
- Limit dairy products.

# IMPORTANT COMPONENTS OF YOUR DIET

## Protein

Protein is important for people with COPD. It can help your body fight infection. The main sources of protein are meat, fish, eggs, poultry, beans, peas, nuts, soy products, and dairy products.

## Fluids

Drinking enough liquid is important for everyone, and especially for people with COPD. Fluids keep you hydrated and prevent constipation. In general, people need to drink about 1.5-2 liters of water per day. In some cases, your health care provider may put you on a fluid-restricted diet. Ask your health care provider or dietitian to help you plan what to eat and drink.

## Salt (Sodium)

Too much salt in your diet can increase your blood pressure and shortness of breath. Don't add salt to your food and avoid salty snacks, deli meats, condiments, and canned products. Cured foods such as bacon contain salt and added ingredients that can worsen COPD.



## Calcium

Calcium is important for overall health. It helps with lung function, muscle strength and movement, and keeps your bones and immune system strong. Calcium can be found in dairy products and some green leafy vegetables such as broccoli and kale. Your body absorbs the calcium you eat with the help of just 20 to 30 minutes of being outside.



Many people with COPD take corticosteroid drugs (both oral and inhaled) which cause a loss of calcium in both men and women. Osteoporosis, a condition of weak bones, can occur. Talk with your health care provider about the risk of osteoporosis.

## Magnesium

Magnesium is an important nutrient that helps muscles work. A low level of magnesium weakens all muscles, including the breathing muscles. Dark green vegetables, fruit, and beans are good sources of magnesium.

## Phosphorus

Phosphorus is a nutrient that helps to build and repair tissues and bones. It can be found in meat, poultry, eggs, and milk products. Phosphorus is also found in nuts, soy products, and whole grains such as rice and oats.

## Potassium

Potassium is a vitamin that helps with muscle contractions. High or low levels of potassium can cause an irregular heartbeat. Foods that are high in potassium include dairy products, tomatoes, fruit, potatoes, and spinach.



# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDICATIONS AND NUTRIENTS

Some COPD medicines can affect your nutritional needs—sometimes the foods you eat can affect how well your medications work. Talk with your health care provider for more information about the relationship between medications, nutrients, and food.





# GOOD NUTRITION IS KEY TO MANAGING YOUR COPD

A healthy, nutritious diet is important for everyone; but it is essential for someone with COPD. Keeping a healthy body weight supports your lungs as they work. Good nutrition gives your body the energy it needs to do the work of breathing and stay active. Eating a balanced diet and making healthy food choices can help you have a better quality of life.



## RESOURCES

Learn more about nutrition on the COPD Foundation website at [copdf.co/Nutrition](http://copdf.co/Nutrition)

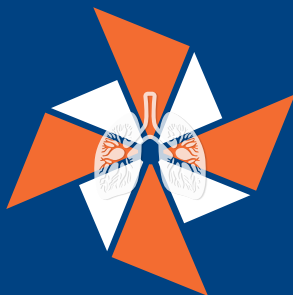
For information designed to help you manage your COPD and thrive with this condition, please visit The COPD Foundation Guides for Better Living at [copdf.co/guides](https://copdf.co/guides)

The Cleveland Clinic “Nutritional Guidelines for People With COPD”  
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/9451-nutritional-guidelines-for-people-with-copd>

Today's Dietitian "Dietary Guidelines for COPD" <https://www.todaysdietitian.com/newarchives/ND20p14.shtml>

## NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.



# COPD FOUNDATION®

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COPD360 Community Support Line:  
1-866-316-COPD (2673)

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1-833-411-LUNG (5864)

This guide has been reviewed by members of the  
COPD Foundation Guides for Better Living Review Team