

UNDERSTANDING PULMONARY REHABILITATION

Understanding Pulmonary Rehabilitation

Pulmonary rehabilitation (or “rehab”) is a term that covers many different approaches. The goals are to decrease the severity of breathlessness as much as possible during daily activity and to increase energy and activity levels in general. Pulmonary rehab is recommended for patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), but most studies of its effectiveness have been done in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Your doctor may prescribe pulmonary rehab as an addition to other types of care. Not every patient is a candidate, however. It’s also important to understand that pulmonary rehab will not prevent the loss of lung function that occurs over time with IPF. It is extremely important to participate in pulmonary rehabilitation if recommended by your doctor.

Pulmonary rehab includes activities such as physical conditioning, exercise training, and breathing exercises. It may also include anxiety, stress, and depression management, as well as nutritional counseling, education, and other programs.

The Possible Benefits and Risks of Pulmonary Rehab

As mentioned above, pulmonary rehab has been studied as a treatment in several different lung diseases and shown to have benefits for many patients who use it. Although there are not as much data on pulmonary rehab for people with IPF, a number of studies have shown it to provide at least some benefits in IPF. These include:

- Improved ability to perform daily activities with less breathlessness
- Increased ability to exercise
- Improved sense of well-being and a more positive outlook
- More energy and an ability to do more

- Reduced anxiety and depression

There are a few risks associated with pulmonary rehab that are generally related to the exercise part of the program. As with any physical training activity, muscle or bone injuries may occur. Also, for people with heart disease, physical activity can increase the risk of a heart attack or arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat). Your doctor will determine how much additional oxygen you need as your rehabilitation program is developed.

Although leading medical guidelines recommend that most patients with IPF receive pulmonary rehab, it may not be right for everyone. You should discuss the option of pulmonary rehab with your doctor to see if your condition allows it and if it might be of benefit to you.

A Team Effort

If your doctor decides that pulmonary rehab is right for you, you should know it involves working with a team of healthcare providers. This team may include nurses, respiratory therapists, physical therapists, social workers, dieticians, and others. It may also include several exercises and lifestyle changes at home. Working closely with your treatment team will help you to know what is expected of you.

