

## UNDERSTANDING PULMONARY REHABILITATION

# Understanding Pulmonary Rehabilitation

Pulmonary rehabilitation (or “rehab”) is a treatment 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 exercise 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. Most, but not every patient is a candidate. It’s also important to understand that pulmonary rehab has not been shown to prevent the loss of lung function that occurs over time with IPF.



“If pulmonary rehab has not been recommended or discussed with your physician, you may want to ask your physician about the therapy. It is extremely important to participate in pulmonary rehab if recommended by your doctor.”

Trina Limberg, *Director of Pulmonary Rehabilitation at UC SD Medical Center*

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.

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“Your rehabilitation therapist will be able to help you figure out a solution that works best for you, as well as answer any questions you may have.”

Chris Garvey, *FNP, MSN, MPA, MAACVPR* University of California San Francisco

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## **The Possible Benefits 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 benefits in IPF. These include:

- Improved breathlessness at rest and with activity
- Increased ability to exercise
- Improved sense of well-being, quality of life, and a more positive outlook
- Reduced anxiety and depression

Pulmonary rehab has been shown to be safe in people with IPF. There are few risks associated with pulmonary rehab that are generally related to the exercise part of the program. As with any physical training activity, there may be a very slight increase in muscle soreness. Also, physical activity can increase the risk of chest pain or arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat). Working in collaboration, your rehab specialist and your doctor will determine how much additional oxygen you may need as your exercise 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 prescribes pulmonary rehab, you should know it involves working with a team of healthcare providers. This team may include nurses, respiratory therapists, exercise physiologists, 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.

