

Sex & COPD

The expression of love,
affection, and sexuality is a
part of being human.

The diagnosis of COPD does not mean the end of sexual activity.

The spectrum of sexual activity is wide, the desires and possibilities are individual. Expressing intimacy with attention, affection, cuddling, bathing together, massages and touching, also with yourself can be just as important as sexual intercourse.

To discover how intimacy can be lived on a different level when sexual activity / arousal is limited, can be an exciting, beautiful task.

It can also be fun to be creative. Both as single person as well as a couple, you may find that you can discover yourself on a whole new level alone or together.

Take the time to think about what you desire and what you want to try for your sensual, intimate experience.

A fulfilling sex life is possible regardless of your age, marital status or stage of illness. It is an important element for the best possible quality of life, which you have the right to if you are ill (European Charter of Patients' Rights).

Fears from the perspective of those affected

For people with COPD, the thought of having sex can be frightening. Perhaps it is the fear of getting short of breath during sex or disappointing their partner. Or the fear of being too tired and unattractive for sex. These are just some of the fears that can cause people with COPD to avoid intimacy and sexual activity in general.

Fears from the partners' perspective

Partners of people with COPD may be concerned that sexual activity may lead to a worsening of symptoms or could even be dangerous.

There is no need to withdraw from intimacy, emotionally detach from their partner or give up sexual activity. There are positive ways to work around COPD.

Following these six helpful tips can help you to experience sex and intimacy in a fulfilling way.

Perceive needs and talk about them

No one can hear your thoughts and know what makes you feel good or uncomfortable. Good communication is very important for improving your sex life. Do not wait too long to talk about it if you are not satisfied with your sex life.

Both you and your partner should be able to honestly express your feelings, desires and fears and find creative solutions to mutual satisfaction.

For example, the following statement can make it easier for you to address this issue: «It is not easy for me, but I would like to talk to you about our sex life.»

Do not be afraid to talk to your doctor or a trusted professional about sex and intimacy.

Get fit, stay fit

Regular physical activity taking part in a training program, e.g., as part of an outpatient rehabilitation program, will help you to reduce your fears about respiratory distress and increase your performance. During physical activity, a certain amount of shortness of breath is normal. Learn what is normal for you and your condition. With regular training, your condition will improve and you will be less breathless.

During sexual activity with moderate exertion (such as cuddling on the sofa) is estimated to use up 2,0 METs*. This is equivalent, for example, to watering a lawn or being a dedicated spectator at a sporting event. An orgasm, which consumes considerably more sexual energy, is equated with >3 METs which is equivalent to climbing a flight of stairs, for example.

Remember! Physical activity is important and of great benefit to slowing the progression of your COPD. If you improve your physical activity and increase your fitness, your sexual activity will also benefit. Increased fitness means being able to experience fulfilling sexual activity with less breathlessness.

Listen to your body

Fatigue can be a result of COPD and can put a damper on intimate life. Pay attention to your body's signals to find out what time of day you feel the most energy. It can make a big difference if sex takes place at a time of day when your energy level is higher. Don't assume that you have to wait until bedtime to have sex.

If you feel rested and take breaks as needed during sexual activity, sex can be easier and more enjoyable.

Conserve energy

Managing your energy is fundamentally important, especially if you are affected by COPD. Avoid excessive alcohol consumption and heavy meals before sex.

The choice of sexual positions can also affect energy consumption. The partner, who does not have COPD, should take the more active role, if possible.

Inhale your bronchodilator and feel less shortness of breath

Regular inhaling is part of the basic treatment. Additional inhalation prior to sex with a bronchodilator medication can, like inhaling before exercise, reduce your shortness of breath during exertion.

Oxygen reduces shortness of breath

If you use oxygen for daily activities, you should also use it during sex. This can make breathing easier. Ask the oxygen provider for extended oxygen tubing so there is more breathing room between you and the tank.

* MET is a «metabolic equivalent», or the ratio of work energy turnover to rest energy turnover. 1 MET is equal to the amount of energy used by an adult person sitting quietly.

It is not always easy to find words for the broad spectrum of intimacy and sexuality – and for one's own needs.

On the following pages, we would like to inspire you with a selection of pictures to tune in to your individual sensuality and support you in feeling your needs and desires regarding intimacy and sexuality and to communicate them if necessary.

We sincerely wish that you find the kind of intimacy and sexuality that suits you best.

Me with myself...
Me and...



Me with myself...

smile at myself



Me with myself...

nurture myself



Me with myself...

spoil myself



Me with myself...

be with myself



Me with myself...

touch myself



Me and...

be connected



Me and...

cuddle – be tender



Me and...

kiss



Me and...

having sex — making love



Me and...

having sex — making love

energy saving positions



Me and...

having sex — making love

oxygen can help

Words of Love

I enjoy being near you.

May I hold you in my arms?

I like the way you touch me.

I'm glad you're here.

I want to caress you

It's nice to look into your eyes.

You make me feel good.

May I give you pleasure

I love you.

Thank you for being close to me.

I enjoy touching you.

A little cuddle would be nice!

Do you have 10 minutes just for the two of us?

You are warm and silky.



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