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Fact Sheet No.7

Looking after your lungs

Looking after yourself and preventing infection in CGD is important for a number of reasons:

You feel ok and are able to go about your daily life and do what you want

It keeps you out of hospital

It keeps you fit for the future

It is important to try and keep infections at bay as much as you can. If you do get an infection it's important to get it sorted out quickly. This way the long-term consequences of infection are kept to a minimum and you look after your health for the future.

Lungs need looking after in order to prevent them becoming damaged and causing breathing problems in the future. The lungs can become damaged by repeated chest infections and inflammation, which can lead to scarring inside the lungs. Scar tissue can sometimes be a useful thing - if you cut yourself and a scar forms it is for a good reason - to help heal and protect the damaged area. But scar tissue that forms in the lungs is not a good thing - it prevents the lungs from working properly and doing the job they're supposed to do i.e. getting oxygen from the air into the blood and round all parts of the body.

Once lungs have become scarred the damage is hard to undo and will have a long-term affect on how well the lungs work. Breathing problems can make you short of breath, short of energy and limited in what you can do.

How the lungs work

Every time you breathe in, air is drawn in through your nose and mouth and down into the lungs. The air you breathe contains oxygen, which is essential for every part of the body to survive. The lungs are designed to transfer oxygen from the air you breathe in into the blood stream. Once in the blood stream oxygen is carried in the red blood cells to all parts of the body.

The lungs lie on either side of the heart inside your chest. Each lung is divided up into sections, called 'lobes' - the left has two and the right lung has three. The tissue inside the lungs looks a bit like a sponge. It is really a mass of tiny air tubes, which end in specialised 'air sacs' called alveoli. These air sacs are covered in tiny blood vessels, called capillaries.





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When you breathe in, air travels through your nose and mouth and then down your windpipe (trachea). The windpipe then divides into two tubes called 'bronchi' - one to take the air to each lung. The bronchi then divide off into more tiny tubes. These are called the bronchioles. Air travels through the bronchioles to the alveoli. Inside the alveoli the oxygen is transferred across the very thin walls of the alveoli into the blood stream.

How to look after your lungs

Prevent infection

Taking daily preventative medication is the best way of minimising the number of infections you might get and the seriousness of the infection when it does happen.

Be alert to the signs of a chest infection

Being wise to the signs of infection helps you to recognise it early. This means that it can be treated more quickly, which can stop the infection becoming more serious. This way any longer-term damage to the lungs is reduced. It also means you will be back on your feet quicker!

Be aware that what starts off as a cold & cough can develop into a chest infection. If you have a persistent cough for more than a couple of days it is best to see your doctor and ask them to listen to your chest. It is better to take a week's course of antibiotics than end up in hospital.

If you take antibiotics for a cough/chest infection and you are not better when the antibiotics run out, make sure you go back to your doctor.

If in doubt, call the CGD Nurse!

Have a flu jab every year!

Although people with CGD have a normal system to fight off viruses, the influenza can sometimes lead to a nasty chest infection, that can require treatment in hospital. So it is sensible to get a yearly jab.

There is one very important contribution you can make towards helping yourself to stay well:

Don't smoke!





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Smoking lowers your immunity and damages your lungs - so if you smoke you are likely to get more infections, particularly chest infections and could develop long-term problems with your chest and breathing.

The easiest way to give up smoking is never to start in the first place! However if you do need to give up smoking there is lots of help on hand. The NHS Smoking Helpline (0800 169 0169 or www.givingupsmoking.co.uk) is a very useful resource and your hospital clinic/ GP can put you in touch with a specially trained advisor who can give you tailor- made advice on how to give up. It's never too late to stop. The sooner you do, the less damage your lungs will suffer. Even cutting down will help your chest and make it easier to give up in the future.

Don't smoke around children!

Second-hand cigarette smoke can also be harmful. So it is important not to smoke around children, especially those with CGD. (Children who live in a non-smoking household are much less likely to take up the habit themselves in later life).

Exercise

Take regular exercise. This helps to keep you fit, boosts your lung function and your immune system. Exercise also causes the release of natural 'endorphins' - chemicals in the brain that increase your sense of well-being. Exercise doesn't mean you have to do anything heroic and needn't involve expensive gym fees. Walking down the road, to the shops or taking the dog for a walk is exercise!

Children too need to take regular exercise. You may think that children are always active but sometimes computer games and DVD's can be more tempting! A walk, cycle ride or swim with family/friends are good ways of encouraging exercise. It is important to encourage a generally healthy lifestyle rather than make exercise feel like a chore.

Exercise should be built up regularly and adjusted to suit you. Don't aim to do too much too often or you will either feel exhausted or find that you can't keep up with your exercise plan. A short walk each day or a gentle exercise or yoga video at home may be for you. Many people with CGD will tire more easily and have lower energy levels than other people. So you may need to take exercise more gently and do a 'little and often'.

If you have breathing or heart problems take advice from your nurse or doctor before you start exercising. You may benefit from seeing a physiotherapist who can develop an appropriate exercise regime to target specific problems and help maintain your lungs at their best.





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Get some help

If you have had a lot of chest infections, have chest or breathing problems currently then it's worth talking to your doctor about seeing a lung specialist. Many hospitals have a Respiratory Nurse Specialist attached to their chest clinics. The Nurse Specialist will be able to make sure you get the help & support you need. They can advise you about how to look after your lungs and the small changes in lifestyle that may make day-to-day life a bit easier.

Important Note: The information contained in this document is intended only as a guideline, not as a substitute for medical advice. Always consult your doctor if you or your child has any CGD symptoms or concerns.

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