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Living well with Interstitial Lung Disease (ILD)

If you have been diagnosed with interstitial lung disease (ILD), you likely have questions about how to best take care of yourself to stay healthy and well. This fact sheet will give you ideas on how to pace yourself, how to stay active, how to eat healthy, how to quit smoking and about planning for your future.

Canadian Lung Association
B R E A T H E

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This document is for informational purposes only and not intended as medical advice.

Pace yourself

When living with ILD, it's important that you take time to learn to pace yourself. It's good to be active every day but listen to your body to know when you need to slow down. Pushing yourself too hard can make your symptoms worse. If you have questions about how much is too much, talk to your healthcare team.

Plan ahead

- Plan activities for the time of day when you have more energy.
- Plan your tasks so that you don't use more energy than you have to. For example, plan activities to limit the number of times you have to go up and down stairs.

Know your limits

- Learn to say no to activities that you think may be too demanding or may make your symptoms worse.
- Limit yourself to one big event or activity per day.
- Ask for help to do things that are necessary but that you may find difficult.

Adapt your usual routine

- Cook double the amount of food you need and freeze half of it for days when you may be too tired or busy to cook.
- Sit down while you prepare a meal or do the dishes.

Listen to your body to know when you need to slow down.



Stay active

It's important to stay active and even to exercise when you have ILD. Being active can help you manage stress, sleep better and feel better. Speak to your healthcare team about an exercise plan that works for you. They will check your oxygen levels to make sure you have enough oxygen in your blood to exercise. If your levels are too low, you may be asked to use oxygen therapy during activity. If you want more information on exercise for ILD, see "Rehab and Exercise" on the [Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation's website](#).

Stretching exercises

Stretching is a good thing to do every day. It is an enjoyable way to relax your muscles, reduce stress and keep your body flexible. Stretching is a good way to warm up or cool down after other exercises.



Stretching every day can help you relax and can make it easier for you to do other types of exercise.

Aerobic exercises

Aerobic exercises are activities like walking, cycling or swimming that move your entire body. They make your heart, lungs and muscles stronger. You should do aerobic exercise at least three times a week for 20 to 30 minutes each time. If you can't exercise for that long, you can break it up until you are able to reach 20 minutes of aerobic exercise without stopping.



Aerobic exercise, like swimming, walking, or cycling, should be done at least three times a week for 20 to 30 minutes each time.

Strength-building exercises

Strength-building exercises work your muscles to make them stronger. You can use weights or resistance bands or your own body weight to strengthen your arms, legs and core (stomach and back). Squats, push ups or wall presses are examples of strength-building exercises you can do with your own body weight. You should do this type of exercises two or three times a week.



You can use weights, resistance bands or your own body weight to do strength-building exercises. This type of exercise should be done two or three times a week.

Eat healthy

It's important that you eat a healthy, balanced diet — including vegetables, fruits, protein and whole grains — when you have ILD. Protein helps build muscle and makes your immune system stronger. Fruits, vegetables and whole grains contain fibre and many vitamins and minerals that your body needs to stay healthy. A healthy, balanced diet can help your immune system fight infection. A healthy weight can also make breathing easier and give you more energy.

Use the Plate Method

The Plate Method is an easy way for you to know if you're eating a balanced diet. Half your plate is fruits and vegetables, one quarter of your plate is whole grains, and one quarter is protein.

Eat smaller meals

Eating large meals can cause your stomach to put pressure on your lungs and diaphragm and make it harder to breathe. It can also make you feel more tired.

Make breakfast your largest meal of the day

Eat your largest meal in the morning and smaller meals and snacks throughout the rest of the day. This can give you enough energy for the rest of the day.

The Plate Method is an easy way for you to know if you're eating a balanced diet. See [Canada's Food Guide](#) for more information.



Make water your drink of choice

Drinks that are carbonated or high in sugar can make you feel full and may affect your food choices for the day. Caffeine, which is in coffee, tea and colas, can interfere with some medications, make it difficult to relax or fall asleep or make you feel nervous or restless. Alcohol can make it harder for you to fall asleep or lose weight.

Cut back on salt

Salt can cause your body to retain water, making it more difficult to breathe. Limiting salt is especially important if you have high blood pressure or heart disease or are taking corticosteroid medication. Look for the word “sodium” (salt) on food labels. Processed foods like canned soups, canned fish or meats can have a lot of sodium. Try to limit your salt to less than 2400 mg (or about one teaspoon) per day.

An easy way to limit your salt intake is to remove the salt shaker from your table. This can help reduce the temptation to add salt to your food.

Eat foods with fibre

Eating foods that are high in fibre can help you feel full so you don't eat too much. High-fibre foods include nuts, brown rice and whole grains.

Avoid foods that cause gas or bloating

Gas or bloating can make it harder for you to breathe. Foods like beans, broccoli, cabbage, cucumbers, peppers, turnips and carbonated drinks are just some of the foods that may cause problems for you.



An easy way to limit your salt intake is to remove the salt shaker from your table. This can help reduce the temptation to add salt to your food.

Manage your stress

Everyone has stress. Stress is a normal part of life. Living with ILD can cause you to feel stress as you learn how to cope with your disease and its symptoms. Learning how to manage your stress can help you stay healthier and happier.

Practice breathing exercises

When you're stressed, your heart rate and your breathing speed up. When you breathe faster, your breathing gets shallower, which can make you feel breathless. Feeling breathless can increase your stress and cause anxiety. Breathing exercises, or controlled breathing, can help you relax when you are feeling stressed or anxious and can help stop the cycle of stress and anxiety. For more on breathing exercises, see the following page.



Listen to relaxation apps or recordings

There are many free or low-cost apps that provide soothing background music or nature sounds, like the sound of rain falling or waves on a beach. Focusing on your breathing and the sound of music or nature will help you slow your breathing and become more relaxed.

Exercise

Exercise is good for your body and can help you manage stress. Yoga, tai chi and Qi Gong are forms of exercise that can be done at your own pace. They help you learn to focus on controlling your body and your breathing. They also keep you moving and active and can help you become more flexible and improve your balance.



Breathing exercises like pursed-lip breathing reduce the number of breaths you take, slowing your breathing and helping you feel more relaxed.

Pursed-lip breathing

Pursed-lip breathing is an exercise you can do that reduces the number of breaths you take, slowing your breathing and helping you feel more relaxed. Breathe in through your nose. Breathe out through your mouth for at least twice as long as your breathed in, with your lips pursed or puckered. For more information, watch the American Lung Association's [video on pursed-lip breathing](#).

Belly breathing

Belly breathing is also called diaphragmatic breathing. It is another way you can slow your breathing and feel more relaxed. Sit or lie comfortably so that you can relax your chest and shoulders. Start by breathing through your nose. Pay attention to how your belly fills with air. Breathe out through your mouth, for at least twice as long as your breathed in. Make sure to lower your shoulders and relax your neck as your practice.

Quit smoking

Stopping smoking can slow the progression of your ILD. In addition to quitting smoking, you should also stay away from sources of second-hand smoke (other people smoking near you).

Quitting smoking is difficult for most people, but there is help. There are different nicotine-replacement therapies and medications that can be used on their own or in combination. Medication works best when paired with counselling. Quitting with the help of counselling and medication will give you the best chance to quit smoking for good.

Your healthcare team can help create a plan to quit smoking that includes methods to manage cravings and withdrawal. For more information, see "[How to quit smoking](#)" on our website.

Nicotine-replacement therapy (NRT)

Patches, gums, sprays or lozenges that contain nicotine can provide your body with the nicotine it craves. You can use more than one type of NRT or combine NRT with medication to help you quit smoking. NRTs are available over the counter (no prescription needed).

Champix© (varenicline)

This medication blocks the affects of nicotine in your brain so you don't want to smoke. A prescription is required for this medication.

Zyban© (bupropion)

It isn't known exactly how this medication works to help you quit smoking. It can help you deal with the withdrawal affects of quitting. A prescription is required for this medication.

Quitting with the help of
counselling and
medication will give you
the best chance to quit
smoking for good.



Plan for your future

Your ILD will likely get worse over time, so it is a good idea for you to plan for the future. This can be hard for some family members. It may be hard for you, but some people feel better knowing they have a plan. The plan does not have to be complicated. It's *your* plan for *your* health and *your* future, so it can be anything *you* want it to be.

A time may come when you are not able to tell your family or healthcare team what you want. Making a plan and talking to them about it will let them know what's important to you so that they can help support you. It will also make it less stressful for your family when making difficult decisions about your care.

Making your plan

Asking yourself the following questions can help you get started in planning for your future:

- How will I manage when I have a flare up? Who will help me?
- When do I need help from my healthcare team?
- What are my options if my disease gets worse?
- Do I want to use oxygen therapy when this happens? When do I want to start it?
- What things do I want to do while I'm healthy? How can I do these things?

Treatment of your ILD. Treatment of your ILD will depend on what type of ILD you have, what caused it and how severe your symptoms are. For more information about ILD treatment, see our fact sheet *Treatment of Interstitial Lung Disease (ILD)*.

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www.lung.ca

QUESTIONS?

Call the Canadian Lung Association Health Information Line at **1-866-717-2673** to speak to a certified respiratory educator. You can also email **info@lung.ca** or visit **www.lung.ca**.

The Canadian Lung Association is the leading organization in Canada working to promote lung health and prevent and manage lung disease. We do this by funding vital research, pushing for improved treatments and smarter policies and supporting patients in managing their health.

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