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## Breathe better, live better

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**T**he act of breathing is something that many of us take for granted. We do not question our ability to walk from one room to the next, we simply do it — breathing in and out with ease.

However, for those with lung disease such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or any condition that makes breathing a challenge, everyday tasks can become daunting. For those suffering, pulmonary rehabilitation can make a big difference.

The Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program at Sturdy Memorial Hospital aims to get people back to their previous level of functioning before their illness took hold.

What started as a four-patient pilot program has grown into a highly respected, medically supervised program with two sessions running concurrently each week. The hospital is a center for The COPD Foundation's Pulmonary Education Program and is also a site for pre and post lung transplant patients.

We know that not being able to breathe is a scary thing.

Our expert pulmonary rehab specialists teach patients everything they need to know about their specific condition to reduce fear and improve functioning. We combine exercise, education, training and support to help people regain a better quality of life.

Often times, people who suffer from a chronic lung disease tend to avoid exercise, which contributes to their being able to do even less. Engaging in the right amount and type of exercise can provide many benefits such as improving strength, cardiovascular health and overall energy.

Program sessions are typically 6 to 12 weeks long with three, 1.5-hour classes each week.

We provide direction and assistance for both aerobic and strength exercises while also dedicating one session a week to learn from experts on a variety of topics including breathing exercises, anatomy, nutrition tips, medication review and stress management. While the structure of the program itself serves as a setting for getting physically stronger, it also offers a sense of community.

Many of our patients come into the program feeling isolated and scared as they have limited their activities and have become inactive due to the difficulties of managing their breathing. Being with peers who face similar challenges offers support and provides a sense of camaraderie that is as equally important.

To better manage symptoms, we teach our patients different breathing techniques and exercises ranging from pursed lip breathing to diaphragmatic breathing exercises. For patients on oxygen, we teach them how and when to use their oxygen for the best results.

When starting the program, many are fearful about the aspect of physical exercise. Our experts understand this. For those who have trouble walking, standing and even drawing a breath, ten minutes on a treadmill or lifting hand weights seems as impossible as taking part in the Olympic Games.

The program starts slowly and exercise increases over time as both stamina and strength increase. We have had patients who could not walk across a room, and after eight weeks, they are able to walk a mile on the treadmill. This type of improvement enhances quality of life.

As our patients get stronger, they are able to engage more at home and in social settings. They often report feeling more like themselves again.

Graduating from the program happens when a patient achieves his or her goals. While the Program may have ended, the journey continues. It is crucial for patients to continue with a diet and exercise plan to maintain fitness and breathing functionality.

For some, this means enrolling into Sturdy's maintenance program, for others this is joining our Wellness Exercise Program at the Hospital or making use of the local area fitness clubs to stay on track. Additionally, anyone with pulmonary ailments including past and present Pulmonary Rehab patients are encouraged to join The Breathing Club, a group that meets regularly and offers support, education and socialization.

Sturdy's Pulmonary Rehab Program has proven to benefit patients with varying diagnoses of lung disease.

If you feel that you or a loved one are a candidate for the program, speak with your primary care physician to determine if you are eligible. If it is determined that you can safely participate in our exercise and medically supervised program, Sturdy's Pulmonary Rehabilitation specialists will work to help you breathe better so you can live better.

For more information, call 508-236-7550.

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