COPD Diet Plan Do’s and Don’ts

by AFRA WILLMORE

Good Food for Lungs

Living a full life with COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) is possible, but it makes sense to give yourself every opportunity to keep symptoms to a minimum and protect your lungs as much as possible. It’s believed some foods can improve lung function. So, let’s take a look at good food for lungs and which foods you should start incorporating into your diet.

What is COPD?

COPD stands for chronic (constantly recurring) obstructive (causing a blockage or obstruction, in this case, narrowed airways) pulmonary (relating to the lungs) disease.

COPD conditions narrow the airways, making it harder to get oxygen into the lungs and getting carbon dioxide out.

The airways are lined with muscle and elastic tissue. In healthy lungs, the springy tissue between the airways pulls on the airways, which helps keep them open.

With COPD, the airways can become narrowed for several reasons:

- The lung tissue is damaged, so there is less pull on the airways.
- Mucus blocks part of the airway.
- The airway lining becomes inflamed and swollen.

COPD usually develops because of long-term damage to lungs from breathing in a harmful substance. This could be:

- Cigarette smoke.
- Second-hand smoke from long-term, close contact with a smoker.
- Smoke from other sources.
- Air pollution.
- Dust.
- Fumes.
- Chemicals.

You’re most likely to develop COPD if you are over 35, have been a smoker, or have had chest problems as a child.

COPD seems to run in families, so if family members have chest issues or have been diagnosed with COPD, you are more likely to be at risk of developing the condition too.

Symptoms include:

- Persistent cough.
- Frequent chest infections.

Treatments for COPD

One of the best things anyone diagnosed with COPD can do is to quit smoking (if they smoke obviously). If you have tried and failed previously, consider consulting a healthcare provider who can offer a structured support program.

You may be offered medication, inhalers, or an exercise and rehabilitation program. A small minority of people may be offered surgery, including lung transplants.

As well as quitting smoking, there are other ways you can help maintain and maybe even improve lung function.

A healthy diet will not cure COPD, but it is believed that what you eat can make a difference on your quality of life with COPD and help fight off potentially dangerous infections, including chest infections.

How Does Food Aid Breathing?

The American Lung Association explains: “The process of changing food to fuel in the body is called metabolism. Oxygen and food are the raw materials of the process, and energy and carbon dioxide are the finished products. Carbon dioxide is a waste product that we exhale. The right mix of nutrients in your diet can help you breathe easier.”

They go on to state that eating carbs produces more carbon dioxide in the body, my fats produce a less amount. So, for COPD patients, a diet with fewer carbohydrates is recommended. Also, healthier fats might help patients breathe easier.

Foods to Improve COPD Symptoms

It’s All About Protein

Cut down on carbs, especially “simple,” empty carbs like:

- Table sugar.
- Cake.
- Candies.
- Sugary sodas and other drinks.

Opt for high-quality protein, like:

- Grass-fed meat.
- Free-range chicken and eggs.
- Oily fish, like mackerel, salmon and sardines, rather than fried fish.

Other good sources of protein include:

- Milk.
- Yogurts (check sugar levels and choose those with no or very little added sugar).
- Cheese.
- Unsalted nuts.
- Dried beans and peas.

If you are overweight, opt for low-fat versions of dairy products and limit the amount of cheese you eat.

Drinking to Help Thin Mucus

Make sure you drink plenty of water; while it keeps you hydrated, it also helps keep mucus thin and easier to remove from the lungs. Doctors usually recommend that people with COPD drink six to eight glasses of water a day.

You can also get your water quota in by drinking some of your daily recommended amount in the form of decaffeinated tea or coffees, 100% fruit juices or coconut water.

Certain foods can help with hydration too, like:

- Cucumber.
- Celery.
- Strawberries.
- Watermelon.
- Spinach.
- Tomatoes.

Foods To Avoid With COPD

Salt is to be avoided as it can cause water retention, which can make it difficult to breathe. It’s easy to cut down by not adding table salt to foods while cooking and cutting down on chips and salted nuts.

However, it is important to read labels, as salt is often added to canned and processed food.

Avoid fried and fatty foods, as the digestive process takes longer and bloating can occur, causing discomfort and issues with breathing.

Limit trans and saturated fats like:

- Butter.
- Lard.
- Fat.
- Skin from meat.
- Hydrogenated vegetable oils.
- Shortening.
- Fried foods.
- Cookies.
- Crackers.
- Pastries.

Cut down on unhealthy take-outs and only indulge in candy or chocolate as an occasional treat.

If you are overweight, your heart and lungs work even harder digesting these types of foods, so it is important to maintain a healthy weight.

Be cautious about what you drink. Some people use sports drinks for rehydration, but be aware that they may contain lots of sugar. Fizzy drinks can cause bloating and pressure in the mid-torso area, which can affect breathing.

Top Tips for Eating With COPD

As well as avoiding fizzy drinks and fatty and processed foods, there are other things you can do to keep

breathing easier.

Eat in Smaller Portions

Eat small meals, eating four to six times a day if necessary, rather than having three big meals. This will keep help your diaphragm move more freely and lets your lungs fill and empty easier.

Limit the Amount You Drink With Meals

If you find drinking fluids with meals makes you feel too full and affects your breathing, limit the amount you drink with meals and drink an hour after eating to stay hydrated.

Take Nutritional Supplements

Consider taking a nutritional supplement, especially if your treatment plan includes steroids, which can leave your body short of calcium. However, it is wise to speak to your doctor before adding any supplements to your routine.