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Healthy Habits for Patients With Alpha-1



The importance of a healthy lifestyle for patients with Alpha-1

Healthy habits are important for everyone, but for patients with Alpha-1, they are essential. Strong nutrition, regular exercise, proper breathing, and clean air are key factors that can help patients improve their quality of life, enhance treatment outcomes, and prevent Alpha-1 from causing other health complications.



Scan here for calorie calculator

Nutrition

Eating healthy can help patients with Alpha-1 avoid other health complications like obesity, diabetes, and even cancer. Here are a few tips on making the right dietary choices:

- Focus on eating from the 5 main food groups to get sufficient nutrients (fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins, dairy)
- Eat the proper amount of calories based on your age, sex, height, weight, and activity level, which can be determined by using a "calorie calculator," such as the one here, provided by the Mayo Clinic
- Consume foods and drinks that are lower in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugar

Exercise

Physical activity, when done properly, can be an integral part of your treatment plan for Alpha-1. Before you exercise, your doctor will need to assess your cardiac risk and capacity to exercise. With Alpha-1, you cannot put too much stress on your heart and lungs. If your doctor finds that you are fit for exercise, he/she may write you an "exercise prescription." This will detail how long, how hard, and how often you can exercise.

There are plenty of benefits to exercise: it helps your heart pump blood and deliver oxygen to the rest of your body, which can alleviate shortness of breath and may help you breathe easier. And while exercise cannot reverse Alpha-1–related lung disease, it can help you feel and function better in your daily life.

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Smoking cessation

A multitude of health risks come with smoking cigarettes, especially for patients with Alpha-1. Quitting and/or avoiding cigarettes may be challenging, but it's possible with support and the right techniques.

- **Medication and behavior modification:** This combination of techniques is typically the most effective way to quit smoking. Enroll in a behavior counseling program and talk to your doctor about FDA-approved cessation medications, which are available over the counter and by prescription
- **Remember your reasons:** You need to quit for yourself and for others. Identify the intrinsic and external reasons you want to give up smoking
- **Positive self-talk:** Affirming phrases can help you overcome your urges to smoke. Think of some phrases or sayings that resonate with you, and remind yourself of them when you feel tempted to have a cigarette

The American Lung Association has ample resources for Alpha-1 patients trying to quit smoking. Visit the 'Quit Smoking' page on their website, **www.lung.org/quit-smoking**, to learn more.

Breathing

Shortness of breath is a common, bothersome symptom of Alpha-1. However, it doesn't have to stop you from completing daily tasks if you practice the right breathing techniques.

Two parts of your breathing are especially important to control:

- **Depth of your breath:** Breathe with your diaphragm to allow the lower part of your lungs to receive air and exchange oxygen for carbon dioxide and other gases
- **Pace of breath:** Breathe deeply and slowly to ensure air reaches the lower part of your lungs

Coordinated breathing techniques can also help slow your breathing and keep your airways open longer, thus increasing the amount of air that moves in and out of your lungs, and increases gas exchange. For instance, pursed lip breathing involves inhaling through your nostrils and exhaling slowly (about 2-3 times longer than you inhaled) while pursing your lips like you're blowing out a candle.

Oxygen therapies

If you are suffering from symptoms of Alpha-1, your doctor may recommend oxygen therapy. There are a couple of therapeutic options available:

1. **Bronchodilators:** Typically administered via inhaler, these medications create better airflow in and out of the lungs by relaxing the muscle that surrounds the airways
2. **Supplemental oxygen:** Oxygen delivered to a patient through a mask or tube, either from a canister or a portable oxygen concentrator

Keeping a healthy environment

If you've been diagnosed with Alpha-1, you need to make sure you're breathing the cleanest air possible to protect your lungs. Here are some tips to promote a healthy environment:


Avoid smoking and stay away from cigarette smoke entirely


When cleaning your home, wear goggles or a mask, or have someone else clean for you if possible


Choose natural cleaning products like baking soda or vinegar instead of chemical products and sprays


Keep a window or door open while cleaning to ensure better airflow

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