The importance of Healthy Lungs in the fight against COVID-19

COVID-19 targets our airways and breathing systems, so it is more important than ever to look after our lung health.

Our lungs defend us from harmful material we breathe in, such as pollution, tobacco or viruses like SARS-Cov-2, which causes COVID-19.

If our lungs are working well, they are better at keeping the airways clear, removing any harmful substances.
Vaccination protects you, but also protects vulnerable people in your community. If enough people are vaccinated, it means that people who cannot have a vaccine are protected. This is called herd immunity.

There are several very safe vaccines for COVID-19. It is important that as many people as possible get vaccinated to protect ourselves and others.

Get vaccinated

Vaccines prevent roughly 2-3 million deaths each year

Stopping smoking

1.1 billion people over the age of 14 smoke worldwide

Smoking damages the lungs and makes it hard to clear out harmful substances, such as viruses and bacteria; this means that it is harder for smokers to fight off infection.

Smoking causes airways diseases, which are a risk factor for more severe symptoms and course of COVID-19.

Quitting smoking can help your lungs to work better within 24 hours of your last cigarette.

COVID-19 symptoms can be much worse for smokers.

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Getting vaccinated can help to keep your lungs healthy. Viruses such as flu and pneumonia can damage the airways, increasing the risk of more severe infections and other lung diseases in the future.

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Air pollution can cause heart and lung diseases, stroke and diabetes – all of which are risk factors for severe symptoms of COVID-19.

Long-term exposure to poor air quality can make our lungs more vulnerable to infections.

Better air quality during quarantine at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic has been linked with fewer deaths from conditions such as COPD, heart disease and stroke.

We are all responsible for improving the air we breathe. Simple actions like:
- using our cars less,
- using energy efficient devices,
- switching off sockets that are not being used, and
- using fireplaces and woodstoves less can help reduce air pollution.

When exercising outside, walking, jogging, or cycling, try to chose routes with lower air pollution. This means smaller and less busy roads or a park.

Regular exercise can reduce the risk of developing heart disease, obesity and diabetes, which are risk factors for severe symptoms of COVID-19.

Being physically active can help prevent lung disease and being fit means you can recover better and faster from any infections you do catch.

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Keeping active, even just gently at home, can improve our immune system and make it better at fighting off viruses.

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Top tips for keeping your lungs healthy

There has never been a more important time to quit smoking – not only for your own health but also for those around you. Contact your local quit smoking service to get the support you need and help reduce your risk of severe symptoms of COVID-19.

Find a level of physical activity that is suitable for you – it could be running, gardening, swimming or chair-based exercises – anything that gets you moderately breathless. Keeping your activity levels up will help keep your lungs and your immune system healthy.

Be aware of the pollution levels in your area – choose healthy travel options such as walking or public transport instead of your car.

Improve the indoor air quality around you – stopping smoking, reducing dampness, keeping buildings ventilated and regular cleaning can all help improve the air we breathe in our homes and workspaces.

Keep up to date with your routine vaccinations – this will reduce your risk of catching viruses and help reduce pressure on healthcare systems during the pandemic.

Sources