



COPD

12 Ways to Breathe Easier Every Day With COPD

by Judy Koutsky Health Writer





IMAGINE TAKING HOURS to load the dishwasher. Or, not being able to walk your dog to the corner. That's real life for people with severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), an umbrella term for emphysema, chronic bronchitis, nonreversible asthma, or a combo of the three conditions. With severe COPD, everyday tasks become major, often inconvenient chores because you can't catch your breath to start or complete them. Luckily, there are some doc- and patient-





Refill Your Water Bottle

Hydration is key for breathing. Heck, the lungs themselves are made of more than 80% water! Hydration allows your lungs to stay moist, which is important for avoiding inflammation of the airways due to the natural process of exhaling moisture and inhaling dry air, says Stephanie Williams, a respiratory therapist and director of

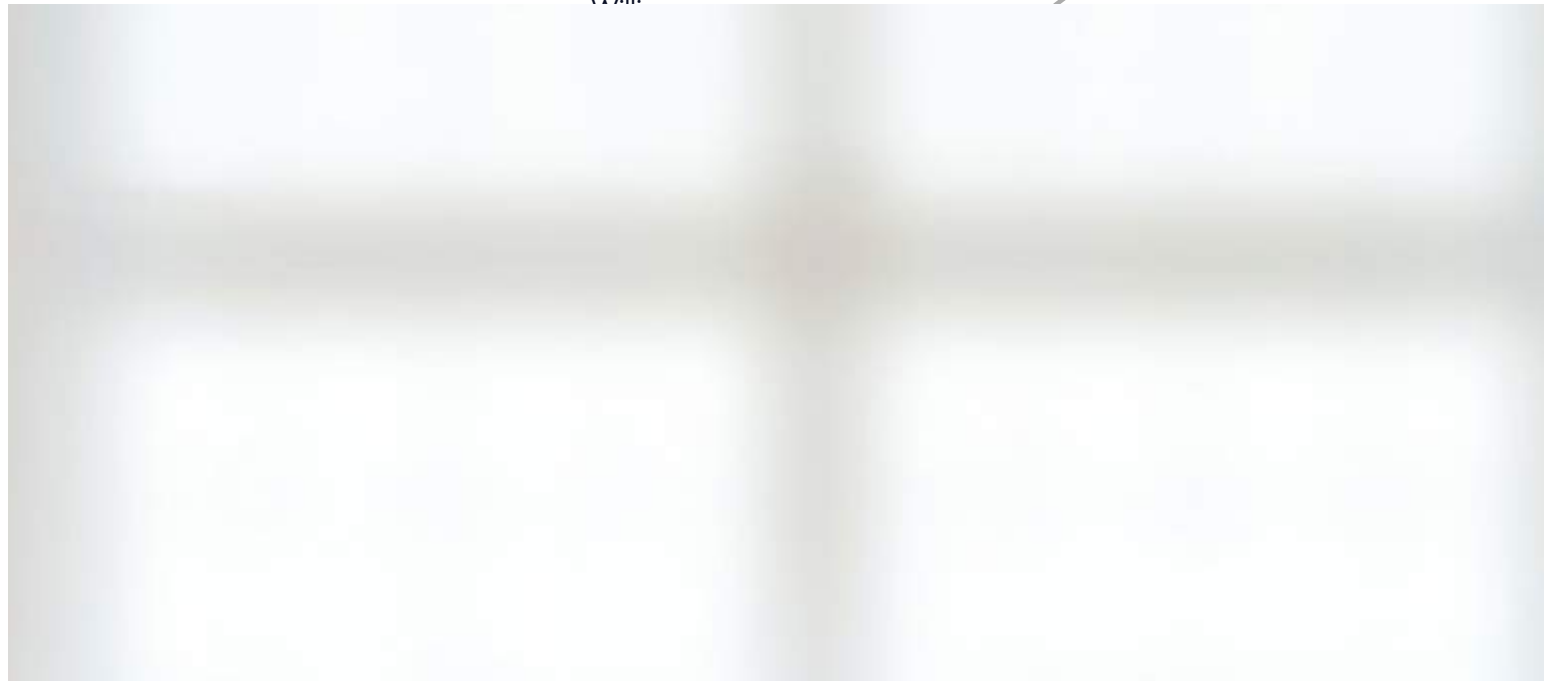
community programs at the COPD Foundation in Miami, FL. While amounts per day vary depending on the person, "drinking adequate water helps to thin mucus and make it easier to cough up





Invest in a Cleaning Service

Common COPD triggers include dust and cleaning products, says Thomas C. Corbridge, M.D., a pulmonologist and adjunct professor of medicine at Northwestern University in Chicago, IL. So, leave the cleaning to someone else. And, if you're able, leave your house while the cleaning is being done to avoid the dust up. Even if you can only afford assistance once a month, opt for a deep clean of the most used rooms. If a cleaning service doesn't fit in the budget at all, consider using vinegar or citrus-based cleaning products that don't have potent chemical smells or residue,





Use a Spacer With Your Rescue Inhaler

Don't leave home without your inhaler... and a spacer. The spacer is a plastic tube that attaches to the mouthpiece of the inhaler and helps drive the medication straight to your lungs, versus being diffused in your mouth. "[Spacers] help those with more severe breathing difficulties get their

full dose of medication,” explains Bill Clark, senior director of community outreach at the COPD Foundation. The spacer works by slowing down the velocity of the med, holding it until you can breathe it all in. A spacer also helps limit side effects like thrush, which are common with inhaled medications that stay in the mouth or throat





Purse Your Lips

Can't seem to catch your breath? "This technique helps to slow the rate of breathing, keeping your lungs open for longer and allowing for improved oxygen exchange," says Julieann Berg, D.P.T., a private physical therapist who works with COPD patients in Philadelphia. It also takes away that horrible feeling of not being able to breathe. Just sit in a comfortable chair and relax your neck, shoulders, and upper back muscles. With your mouth closed, take a breath in through your nose for a count of two. Purse your lips and slowly exhale through your mouth, like you're blowing a kiss, for a count of four. Keep going until you feel the normal rhythm of your breath return.





Practice Breathing from Your Diaphragm

“Diaphragmatic breathing can be

performed while lying on your back, sitting, or standing," Berg says. Start by placing your hands on your belly and relaxing your upper body. Take a deep breath in through your nose as you fill your belly with air. If you are using your diaphragm to breathe, your belly will rise as you inhale. As with pursed-lip breathing, if you inhale for a count of two, you should exhale for at least a count of four. This exercise, when done a few times a day, helps to strengthen the diaphragm, which is the primary muscle of





Sit Up Straight

“Breathing relies on our musculoskeletal system and specifically the muscles of the rib cage to allow expansion and contraction to inhale and exhale,” says Dr. Caplan. “Poor posture makes it extremely difficult to get full lung expansion and therefore make it harder to breathe.” Maintain good posture by keeping shoulders down and back and sit or stand

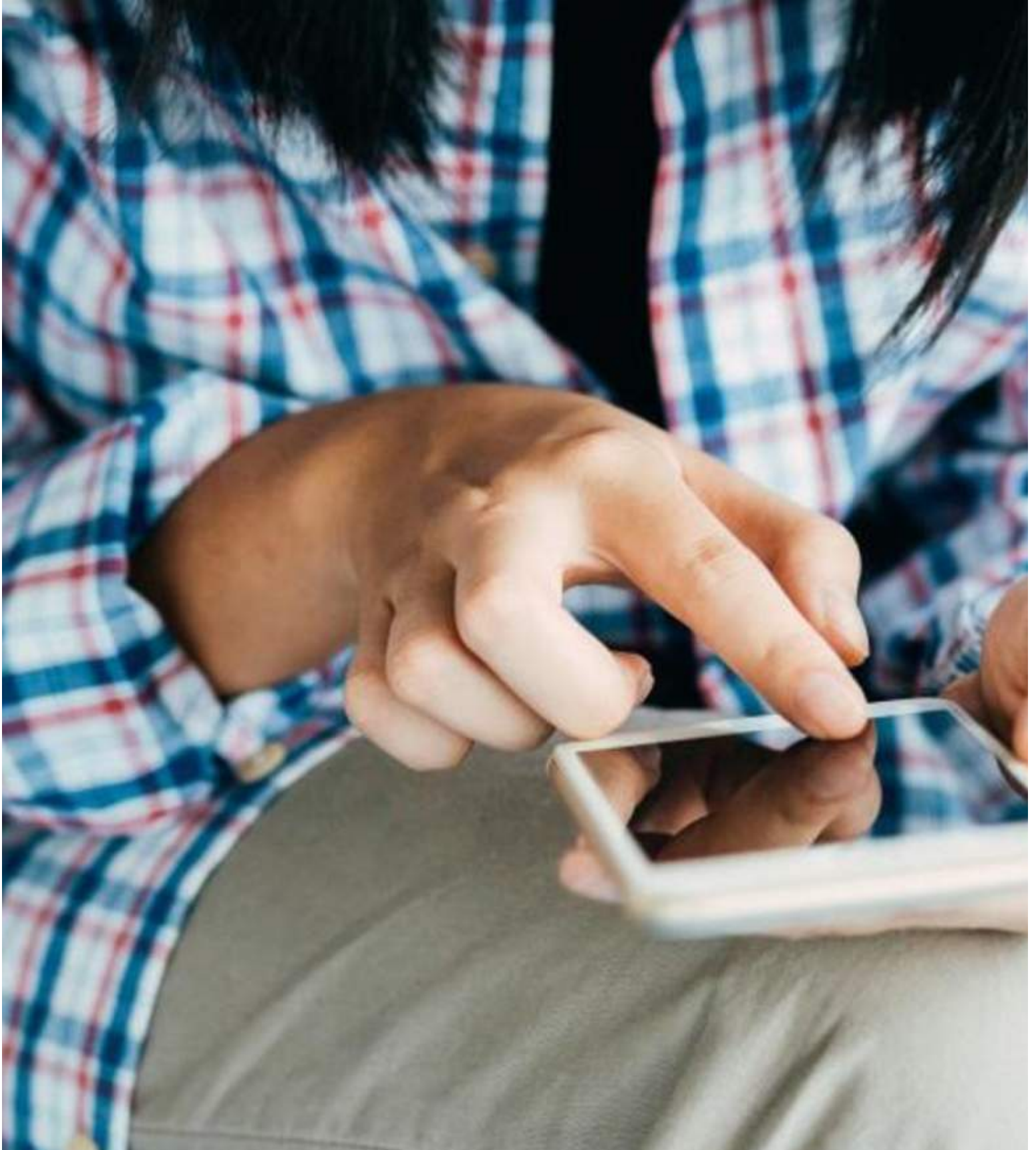




Find Your Zen

“Stress can tighten the muscles used for breathing, which will cause you to take shorter breaths,” says Dr. Caplan. This can also lead to muscle fatigue and diminished oxygen uptake, he says. Practicing mindfulness can be a simple way to help

you let go of anxiety—and you can do it wherever you happen to be. An easy way to get started? Download an app like





Try a Medication Reminder

Can't remember to take your COPD meds? You're not alone. According to the Food and Drug Administration, medicine is *not* taken as prescribed 50% of the time. To get in a groove, download an app—like [Mango Health](#) or [MediSafe](#) to your phone so that you receive regular, consistent reminders. If you're not comfortable using an app, a days-of-the-week pill container is also a good way to remember to take it, and tying your medication to a daily routine—like brushing your teeth—also





Go Slow When Grooming

Grooming is one area that most people with COPD have some difficulty with. "Having a chair or stool available while you are washing your face or brushing your teeth and using an electric shaver can save a lot of energy," says Williams. When we rush, we tend to hold our breath; it's important to take your time, use your supplemental oxygen as needed, and don't



Take a Better Shower

If you have COPD, showers are preferred to baths, mainly because they require less effort (and oxygen!) to get in and out of the tub. But there are some tricks to make the process even less taxing. For starters, use a shower chair or bench to cut down on energy expenditure. “Leaving a bit of the shower curtain open at the back helps to circulate air so the steam doesn’t stifle your breathing,” explains Williams. She also suggests using your oxygen while you get squeaky clean by running the tube over the top of the shower rod so that you’re pumping more O₂ into the shower space. When you’re done, slip into a terrycloth robe so you don’t have to waste energy drying off with a towel

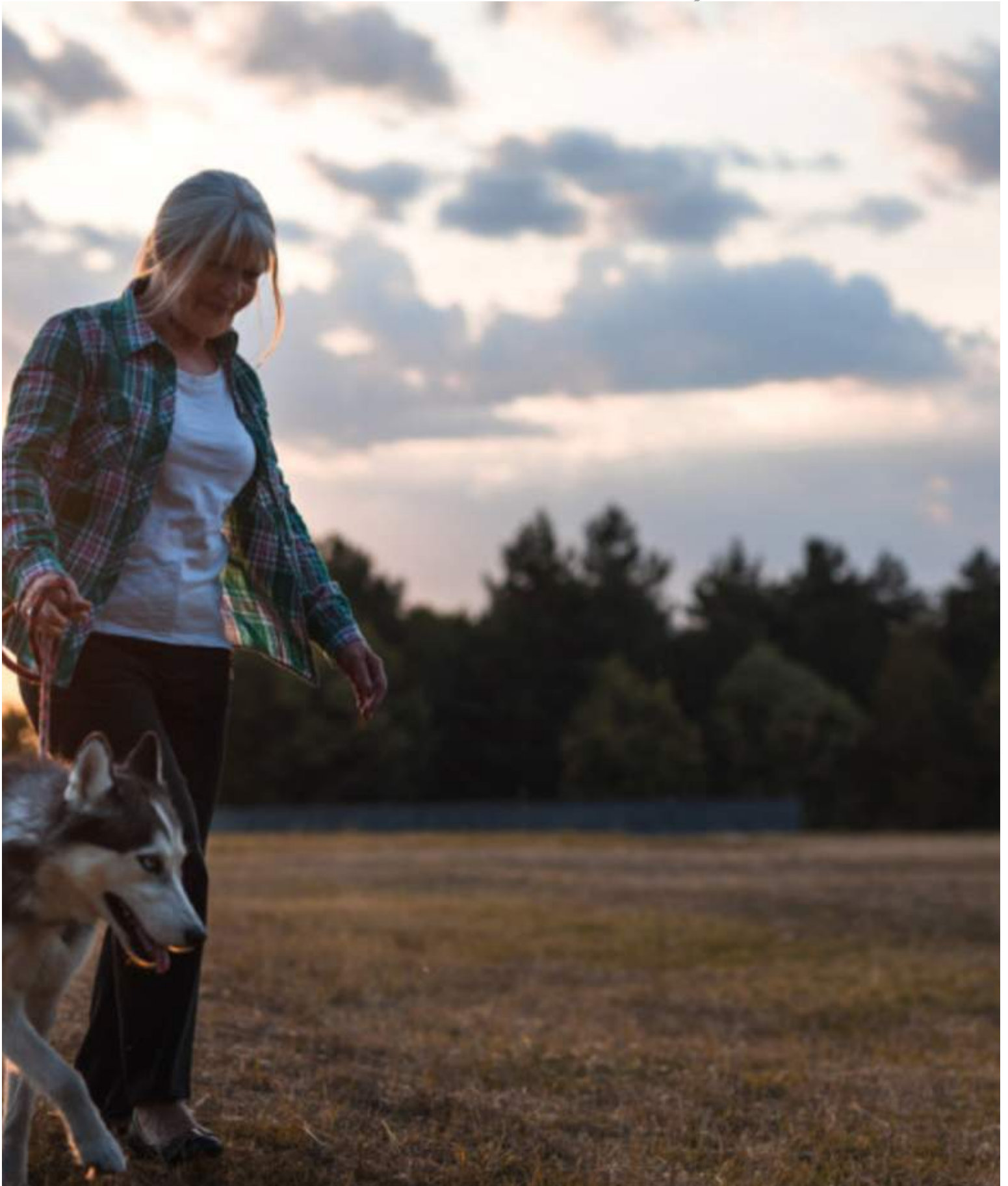




Shop Right

Make grocery shopping way easier by using an electric cart. If your fave store doesn't have them available, take full advantage of a standard shopping cart by "leaning on it and allowing it to act as an assist device while you are at the store," says Williams. "You may be surprised at how far you can walk with a little bit of support like that." Bring a reacher to the store with you, so that you can easily grab items on higher shelves when a store clerk is nowhere to be found. For items that might be too heavy or large, consider having family and friends help, or have them







Get a Health Boost with a Pooch

Before you chuck your walking shoes, check this: A study published in *Respirology* found that COPD patients who walked about two miles a day significantly lowered their risk of being hospitalized. One way to ensure you get out and about each day is by having a dog. They need walks and so do you! If you have advanced COPD symptoms, a specially trained service dog can be an important source of support, physically and emotionally. They can carry your supplemental oxygen (helping you stay active), turn on the lights, and pick up things you drop. And of course, there's all the love, too.



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