

PERSPECTIVE

The Daily Breathing Struggle Faced by Individuals Living with Cystic Fibrosis

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DESCRIPTION

The condition affects breathing in a way that steadily influences day-to-day activities, emotional balance, and long-term health. The condition originates from changes in a gene that influences fluid movement across tissues. When this process becomes faulty, the body produces thick mucus instead of normal thin secretions. This thicker material is especially problematic in the lungs, where it blocks airflow and traps bacteria. Because of this, many individuals experience repeated coughing, chest tightness, and episodes of infection throughout their lives. Breathing is something most people never think about, but for someone with this condition, it demands constant attention. Morning routines often begin with airway-clearing techniques. These involve various methods such as handheld devices that provide vibrations to loosen mucus, controlled breathing cycles to move air deeper into the lungs, and physical tapping on the chest performed either by a caregiver or automated equipment. These steps help clear the lungs before breakfast or school, ensuring a better start to the day. Without them, breathing becomes harder as thick secretions accumulate, causing discomfort and reduced lung movement.

During colder seasons or when environmental pollution levels rise, symptoms often become more noticeable. The lungs may feel heavier, coughing can intensify, and tiredness sets in more quickly. Many individuals plan their day around these moments, avoiding long periods outdoors when the air quality is poor. Families learn to identify early signs of breathing difficulty so they can begin treatment sooner, preventing symptoms from worsening. This careful attention helps reduce hospital visits and supports overall stability. Medications play a major role in managing lung function. Many people use inhalation treatments several times a day, including medicines that open the airways, thin mucus, or reduce inflammation. These treatments are done through

nebulizers or inhalers that convert liquid medicine into fine mist. Sessions may take anywhere from a few minutes to nearly half an hour, depending on the medication. For school-aged children, teachers and caregivers often provide supportive environments, allowing scheduled breaks for these treatments when needed.

Repeated lung infections are another common issue. Because thick mucus traps bacteria, individuals may experience coughing spells, fever, or chest pain more often than others. Doctors frequently prescribe antibiotics, sometimes taken by mouth and sometimes delivered through inhalation or intravenous methods. While these medicines help control infections, they require careful dosage and regular monitoring. Each episode, if not addressed on time, can affect overall lung function, so early communication with healthcare teams becomes essential. Physical activity has a positive influence on breathing in many cases. Activities like swimming, cycling, stretching, or brisk walking help keep the lungs more open and assist in clearing mucus. These movements strengthen chest muscles and promote better airflow. However, stamina varies from person to person. Some individuals feel energetic and active, while others may tire more quickly or struggle during high humidity or extreme temperatures. Paying attention to the body's signals helps maintain balance and avoid discomfort.

Sleep is another area impacted by breathing challenges. Congestion tends to worsen at night due to lying flat, which limits natural drainage of secretions. Many individuals sleep in slightly raised positions or use supportive pillows to reduce night-time coughing. Medical teams often provide guidance on sleep routines, helping individuals find comfort and ensuring that oxygen levels remain within a healthy range during the night. Emotional wellness is deeply connected to breathing difficulties. Constant awareness of symptoms, along with daily treatments, can lead to frustration or stress. Young people may feel different from their peers due to medical routines or limitations in physical activities. Families often seek counseling or peer groups where individuals can share experiences openly. Understanding that these feelings are normal helps build resilience and supports mental strength over time.

As children with this condition grow older, they transition into managing their own care. Learning how

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to use inhalation devices correctly, understanding triggers that worsen symptoms, and staying consistent with daily routines empowers them to take control of their health. People gradually shift from full oversight to shared responsibility, enabling the young adult to develop independence. Even though the condition requires ongoing attention, many individuals lead active and engaged lives. They pursue education, careers, work balance and hobbies while maintaining their constant routines. With increasing awareness, schools and workplaces often make reasonable adjustments,

such as allowing access to inhalation treatments or providing flexible schedules when symptoms worsen. Understanding the breathing challenges associated with the condition offers insight into the strengths individuals display every day. Their commitment to maintaining lung function, combined with support from families and healthcare teams, helps them navigate both routine activities and difficult moments. The daily effort they invest reflects determination, endurance and a desire to live fully despite the limitations placed on their lungs.