

## About Exercise and COPD Part 2 - The Home Gym

In my previous column I wrote a terribly lengthy and somewhat rambling (my apologies) piece on some of the obstacles preventing many people from starting fitness programs. I then expounded a bit further by extrapolating the argument in order to apply it to people who have medical challenges. The point of that column was that if it is hard for basically healthy people to get motivated to exercise, how much harder then is it for people who are not healthy? In this column, I intend to develop the idea a bit further, with the ultimate objective of offering a strategy for overcoming the obstacles that prevent us from achieving the active, healthy and vibrant lifestyle we all aspire to have. Having been born with Cystic Fibrosis, I know all about struggle. At times, I feel like every day of my life has been a battle. I have had to fight for just about everything I have ever wanted, not the least of which is the very privilege of being able to breath and stay alive. Exercise and dogged determination has always been, and continues to be, my best asset. Admittedly, I am stubborn to a fault and downright mean a good amount of the time. Ask anyone who knows me and they will tell you that to know me is to love me or hate me. I am not bragging mind you. Far from it. I can look back over my relatively scant 44 years and see the numerous occasions where I have made an imbecile of myself. I can see the countless times I've shown my ass. I can count on maybe 1 1/2 hands the number of true friends I have in this world, and boy oh boy have I lost count of the number of people I have pissed off. Clearly though, it is my occasionally combative nature that has gotten me this far with my illness. I was ideally suited for Cystic Fibrosis and I WILL beat this fucker into the ground before it is over (pardon my French). As tenacious as I am, I still encounter obstacles that I have had to circumvent in order to move closer to my objective of optimum health. I use the word "circumvent" strategically, because sometimes in life you find that the best way to deal with an obstacle is not to go through it, but somehow around it. And I can guarantee you that if you are reading this column, and you also happen to have some form of COPD, I know the challenges you are facing when considering exercise as a form of therapy. So let not your heart be troubled for I am about to give you a strategy to help you deal with one of those obstacles. First, let us identify one of the biggest obstacles facing anyone with COPD who wants to get fit and strong. Gyms today are all the rage. Yet, for all of the popular advantages of commercial gyms, there are several key drawbacks that increasingly polarize people. More and more, gyms are becoming a place for "the beautiful people", and the very folks that need to be there are the very people that are going to be turned off by that sort of elitist atmosphere. Gyms are also becoming increasingly overcrowded, which is counterproductive if what you are looking is an efficient, intense workout program. Nothing destroys a quality workout like having to wait 15 minutes for a pair of 15 lb. dumbbells, or a leg extension machine for Pete's Sake! Then there are the rules, which are getting positively ridiculous, absurdly asinine and wholly unacceptable. Can you believe that in some gyms you are not allowed to even grunt when you lift a weight? No lie! You can get kicked out of some gyms for merely grunting to loud! In some "gyms" no chalk is allowed. What, you ask? No chalk? Are you kidding me? And get this.....and I kid you not.....in some gyms.....NO COUGHING IS ALLOWED. I am totally serious about this. I have seen it with my own eyes. Now, I understand the reasoning behind the last rule. I really do. But rules like the last one hardly make a gym a comfortable home away from home for anyone with breathing difficulties. The fact that you may not be contagious is irrelevant. The bottom line is that some gyms just do not want "sickly" people working out there. So, where does that leave someone who needs to exercise in order to stay healthy? Trust me when I tell you that people who are chronically ill already have certain sensitivities they carry on their shoulders, and gyms with rules like this last one about coughing will only make someone with a chronic illness that much more self conscious, and therefore less likely to pursue a workout program. This is one of those obstacles that needs to be overcome if anyone with COPD stands a chance at getting fit and strong. Luckily, there is an incredible workaround to the above obstacles facing us in commercial gyms: It's called THE HOME GYM. Training at home has significant advantages over training at commercial gyms, and the advantages are numerous. This is particularly true for people with chronic medical challenges. Training at home gives you the freedom to just be yourself, without having to worry about the prying and judgmental eyes of gym staff just waiting for an excuse to get rid of you. Training at home permits you immediate access to the exercises you want to perform. There is no need to timidly stand by while some 240 lb. X-Man hogs the dumbbell rack. When you train at home, you choose your own music, your own equipment, you wear whatever clothing suits you etc. Most importantly, if you have some sort of medical challenge, training at home allows you the piece of mind that comes with knowing that you can manage your particular illness on an as needed basis when you work out. For some people, like myself for example, this is very important. In addition to having CF, I also have a touch of asthma. This "double whammy" of challenges is not easy to manage. Sometimes when training, breathing becomes difficult and I may find myself coughing or wheezing, or both. I may need to grab my inhaler. And if the symptoms are bad enough and persist, I may need to take a breather. This can happen without warning, and often does happen. At a gym (and I speak personally here) I am somewhat self conscious when this happens. I don't particularly enjoy being gawked at when my symptoms become acute. I would much rather be in the privacy of my own home where I can comfortably manage my symptoms when the need arises. In this way, I am comfortable because I do not have to worry about what others think. Granted, I would never presume to speak for everyone managing some form of chronic illness. Maybe you have COPD, but maybe you are not as self-aware as I am. In that case, this article is not meant for you, but I wonder how many people with some form of COPD feel like I do? Can any of you relate to this? If you can, then this series of articles is for you. If you have COPD, and you want to work out to get fit and strong, and you have avoided commercial gyms for any of the the reasons listed above, and if you have thought about a home gym, then your next question should be this: "OK, so I want to build a home gym. How do I do it? What is the best way to go about working out at home, safely and productively?" That, ladies and gentlemen, is the 10K dollar question. We will provide the answers in part 3 of this series. Stay tuned.

## About the Author

At the popular Lake County Forest Preserve Dog Exercise Areas, top dogs come from Lake County. An approved permit good at the four Dog

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