

Media Release

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BAY OF PLENTY
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HAUORA A TOI

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Breathless not helpless

Over 200,000 New Zealanders suffer with a long term chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) such as emphysema or chronic bronchitis. COPD is a progressive disease of the lungs which makes it hard to breathe and can cause coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness, and other symptoms. For severe sufferers, this curtails daily life to the point where lifting a kettle to make a cup of tea is difficult.

2009 World COPD Day takes place on November 18 and this year's theme is *Breathless not Helpless*. At Tauranga Hospital this positive message rings true for sufferers who take part in a seven week programme designed to help them feel better and live more active lives.

"Breathlessness is not just an inevitable part of getting older," says respiratory specialty nurse Jenny Parry. "It could be the early stages of a disease."

The programme runs twice a week and includes strengthening exercises in the hospital gym, a 20 minute walking programme, as well as expert advice on diet, nutrition, quitting smoking and ensuring people are getting the best out of their medication. For some it is enough to get them back into the workforce. Programmes also run in the Eastern Bay in Kawerau, Opotiki and Whakatane.

"We'd like to encourage people who are suffering from persistent shortness of breath to speak to their GP about a referral to the programme. Don't just put it down to old age or a lack of fitness," says Jenny. "COPD can have a severe impact on quality of life, so don't leave it too long to take action."

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