Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation. Say it five times, ten times. Repeat it really, really fast, with excitement! Are you now a little out of breath? Does it induce a slight anxiety, raising your pulse or make you a little tired? If you are someone who has been diagnosed with lung or heart disease, the sense of breathlessness, tiredness, or the awareness of your heartbeat may be your constant companion. Not a friend... this is a companion who can be downright scary.

A more helpful friend is awaits at North Valley Hospital. Its name is Cardiopulmonary Rehab, a program that aims to get patients with heart or lung disease back to doing the things they thought they could no longer attempt.

According to Carrie Bates, RT, Manager of Respiratory Therapy and the Cardiopulmonary Program at NVH, the program’s goals are to

- Educate patients about their specific disease and its process, including medications
- Develop an individualized exercise program to increase strength, endurance and balance
- Strengthen heart and lung muscles
- Improve confidence and boost self-esteem

Your new friend is along with you three times a week. Patients come to North Valley Hospital for an initial evaluation, then they ease into a regimen tailored specifically for them. They meet with a nutritionist and a specialist clinician to discuss their concerns. Plus they have a medication review with an NVH pharmacist. Patients are involved in setting up their individualized exercise program that is, in turn, closely supervised by clinical staff who monitor and record the patient’s heart rate, blood pressure and oxygenation. Progress is shared with the patient and his or her doctor.

The sessions are relaxed, fun and friendly. Patients soon bond, spurring each other on to greater successes. “It is so much fun for me to see a patient progress,” Carrie says. “Their accomplishment turns into my accomplishment. I see them achieve their goals and it’s very satisfying.”

Carrie talks about a patient whose emotional frailty so overwhelmed her physical state that she consequently lacked the confidence even to attempt the six-minute walk test given to cardiac patients. After she joined the program, she was gently encouraged to take baby steps toward her goals. As she progressed the patient got involved with other patients and was able to build strength and trust through mutual support. Her self-esteem restored and she found her strength recovering. She told Carrie that she was excited that she was able to resume many of her former activities.

Cardiopulmonary rehab is covered by most insurances. While a physician referral is required, the patient’s provider does not need to be on staff at North Valley Hospital. As a component of NVH’s Planetree philosophy of patient-centered care, it offers physical and emotional support for those with heart or lung diseases. Patients attest that cardiopulmonary rehab is also an enjoyable place to learn about yourself and to make new friends.

Cardiopulmonary rehab. You only need to say it once.