



Breathing Easy Outlook

STAYING HEALTHY ■ LIVING WELL

WINTER 2008

When Medications Don't Help

Have you taken your chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) medication as directed, only to have your symptoms get worse over the past few months? If this happens, don't shrug it off. It's important to find out what's going on. Here are two reasons why your medications may not be helping:

1. COPD can get worse over time. Many people who start out needing only a rescue

medication eventually need to use daily controller medication, too. If your symptoms are gradually worsening or you're using more rescue medication than you used to, tell your health care provider. You may need a change in medication.

2. You're having a flare-up. If you suddenly feel short of breath and your rescue medication isn't helping, you may be having a flare-up. Chest

tightness, coughing more often, and coughing up mucus are other signs of trouble. If you have these symptoms, call your provider right away. Get emergency help if you have trouble talking, walking, or catching your breath.

Here's the bottom line: Don't ignore your symptoms. Get the right treatment and medication to keep your health on track.



What Is a Health Care Surrogate?

A health care surrogate* is someone who would make decisions about your medical care if you were too ill to do so for yourself. For example, if you were in a coma or too sick to communicate, the surrogate would discuss with your health care team what kind of care you would want. Another name for a health care surrogate is a health care agent or proxy.

A health care surrogate must use his or her judgment, so it's important to choose someone you trust to follow your wishes. This might be a close friend or family member. Being a surrogate can be difficult emotionally, so be sure that the person you are considering is willing to do this.

You need to name your surrogate in a legal document called a durable power of attorney for health care or health care proxy. Ask your health care provider about filling out this document. That way you'll have peace of mind knowing that your wishes will be respected.

* Please note that laws regarding health care surrogates or proxies vary from state to state.

Good Health Guidelines

For people with COPD, it's important to make sure the following tests and vaccines are kept current:

- Spirometry test
- Flu vaccine
- Pneumonia vaccine

Be sure to talk with your health care provider about these topics:

- Writing an Action Plan
- Having a nutritional assessment
- Reviewing your exercise routine
- Taking part in a pulmonary rehabilitation program
- Quitting smoking

A CLOSER LOOK

A Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program

Pulmonary rehabilitation programs provide education and exercise for people with COPD. This type of program can help improve your breathing, symptoms, and daily activities. You'll work with the staff to plan activities tailored to your needs. Here are some topics you might want to include:

- Understanding your medications
- Using oxygen therapy
- Managing breathing problems
- Following a healthy diet
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Coping with depression, stress, and anxiety
- Getting help with quitting or staying smoke-free

Not all health insurance covers these programs, so be sure to check with your plan.

Although these are suggested guidelines for care, please check with your benefits plan for coverage.

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Manage Stress

When You Quit Smoking

There's no question about it: Quitting smoking is the hands-down winner when it comes to improving your health. But resisting the urge to smoke can make you feel stressed-out—just what you don't need. Learn healthy ways to cope with stress, and you'll feel more relaxed and in control. This three-step approach can help:

STEP 1: Recognize signs of stress. These include trouble sleeping; headaches; stomachaches; changes in appetite; lack of concentration; and feeling anxious, nervous, or depressed.

STEP 2: Identify your stress triggers. Triggers may include a hectic schedule and daily irritations. Or they could be bigger things, such as problems at work, financial worries, ailing friends or relatives, or a relationship that's not going well. By clearly identifying the source of your stressful feelings, you can start to manage them.

STEP 3: Learn stress-reduction skills. Here are some that may help:

- **Learn a relaxation technique.** Deep breathing is a powerful tool for people trying to quit smoking. The American Lung Association has instructions on its Web site, www.lungusa.org. Yoga and progressive muscle relaxation may also be helpful.
- **Take 15 minutes for yourself every day.** Listen to music, take a stroll, or do something else that makes you feel peaceful.
- **Get enough rest.** Lack of sleep makes stress worse and increases your chance of becoming sick.
- **Get some exercise.** Physical activity relieves tense muscles, boosts mood, and calms the mind. Choose something you enjoy, whether it be brisk walking, dancing, tennis, or another activity.
- **Set limits.** When your plate gets full, learn to say no so that you conserve your time and energy.

By learning to actively manage stress, quitting smoking will be easier. There couldn't be a better prize.



Combat Cigarette Cravings

Many smokers get into the habit of lighting up when a stressful situation arises. To combat this, take action as soon as you crave a cigarette:

- Grab something to keep your mouth busy: gum, pickles, carrot sticks, a few nuts, or a crisp apple.
- Move to a different room or go outside.
- Take a warm, relaxing shower.
- Take a walk.
- Take several slow, deep breaths or do a breathing exercise.
- Do something with your hands. Wash your hands, do the dishes, or work on a crafts project.
- If you find yourself thinking, "Just one cigarette won't hurt," replace it with the thought, "One will hurt—I've come this far, and I will not give in now."

Cravings don't last. By immediately doing something to change your focus, you can get past the momentary urge to smoke.



How to Get the Best Care Possible

Have you ever watched a circus performer juggle balls, rings, and pins all at once? When you're managing a chronic condition such as COPD, it can feel like that's what you're doing. Medical tests, doctor visits, and pharmacy trips are a lot to juggle. It's not surprising that some things get overlooked now and then. To make sure you get the best and safest care, keep your eye on these three important things.

The Right Tests and Treatments

Medical research tells us that patients who are involved in their medical care tend to do best. So ask questions, express

your concerns, and learn about your condition.

- Tell your health care provider about all your symptoms, even if you think something isn't important. Keep all your provider appointments.
- If your provider recommends a test or treatment, ask why it's needed and how you'll benefit. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, having more tests and treatments isn't always better.
- When a test is done, ask when the results will be ready. If you don't hear anything within a reasonable time period, call your provider and ask about the results.

- Consider bringing a family member or friend to appointments. He or she can take notes or help you remember and understand what your health care provider said.

Safe Rx

Many people take several medications. But some drugs shouldn't be taken together, and some aren't safe for people with certain medical conditions. To head off potential problems:

- Keep a list of your medications, including over-the-counter products and dietary and herbal supplements. Take the list to every health care visit. Or bring your medications in a bag. This is especially important if you see more than one health care provider.
- Tell your provider about any allergies or reactions you have to drugs, such as a rash or an upset stomach.
- When your provider writes a prescription, make sure you can read it. If you can't, ask him or her to write it in block letters.
- When you pick up your prescription, check the label to make sure it's what your health care provider prescribed. Tell your pharmacist if the drug is a different color or shape than before. Occasionally pharmacies make a mistake or misread the doctor's handwriting.
- Read the instructions on the bottle before you leave. If they aren't clear, ask the pharmacist for help.

Safe Hospital Stays

People often worry about entering the hospital, but hospitals have many procedures in place to ensure a safe stay. You can help with these steps:

- Ask your provider what medications you'll be given. Before you take a medication, ask what it is and what it's for.
- Remind health care workers to wash their hands before touching you. Hand washing helps prevent the spread of germs.
- Before leaving, get written instructions on taking care of yourself at home. Understand your follow-up care, what medications to take, and how to take them.

Sometimes health care is a balancing act. By staying involved and informed, you can help your health care team take good care of you.

Medication Savvy

The American Academy of Family Physicians recommends asking these five questions:

- Why do I need this medication?
- How should I take it?
- What side effects should I watch for?
- Is it safe to take it with my other medications?
- What food, drink, or activities should I avoid when taking this medicine?

Time to Change Your Environment?



You know that going into a smoky bar when you're trying to quit smoking isn't a good idea—it's likely to trigger the urge to light up. And that box of doughnuts in the break room at work? It's hard to resist, even though you're trying to eat healthier. Sticking with new healthy behaviors isn't easy, but it helps when your environment works for you, not against you. Take these steps to let go of old behaviors:

- Get rid of things—or avoid situations—that trigger the undesired behavior.
- Put up reminders that motivate you to engage in the new healthy behavior.

Here are some examples of ways to do this.

Quitting Smoking

- Toss out ashtrays.
- Keep a supply of gum, hard candy, or whatever else can help you get through rough spots.
- Avoid the smoking crowd at work by pairing up with a nonsmoking coworker to take short walks during breaks.

Eating Better

- Store healthy snacks where you can see them. Store cookies and chips out of sight for an occasional treat.
- Stick a weekly reminder note on the refrigerator, such as, "Have fruit with breakfast."
- Stock the freezer with easy-to-fix frozen vegetables.

Being Active

- Clear a small area in your home to exercise.
- Keep dumbbells and other small exercise equipment visible, in a basket or on a rolling cart for easy use.
- Mark days to go to the gym on the calendar.

With just a few changes, your environment can help you along toward your healthy new goals.



COPD exacerbation. A sudden worsening of symptoms, such as increased shortness of breath, increased coughing, and coughing up more mucus than usual. Other symptoms are wheezing, chest tightness, a change in sputum color, and fever. Exacerbations are often caused by an infection or air pollution. They are usually treated with medication, and recovery may take several weeks.

End-of-life care. Care given to someone who is in the advanced or terminal stages of an illness. This care is intended to meet a person's medical, psychological, and spiritual needs.

Sputum. A term for mucus or phlegm. People with COPD often bring up sputum when they cough, and this is often one of the first signs of the disease.

BREATHE BETTER in Cold Weather

Grab a hat and scarf and bundle up! When icy temperatures and chilly winds set in, COPD symptoms can worsen. You may find yourself becoming short of breath more easily when you're outdoors. Doctor visits and hospitalizations for COPD increase during bouts of cold weather.

Chilly temperatures can irritate the lungs, causing the airways to tighten and become narrower. This happens for two reasons. When your face gets cold, the nerves in the skin send a signal to the lungs, telling the airways to constrict. In addition, breathing cold air into the lungs triggers airway constriction. This makes it harder for the lungs to take in enough oxygen. People with COPD are especially likely to have breathing problems if cold weather lasts for a week or more.

There are some simple things you can do to breathe more easily on chilly days:

- **Wear a scarf wrapped over your mouth and nose.** Or wear a cold-weather mask. Either one will keep your face warm and warm the air you breathe. You can find cold-weather masks at medical supply stores or on the Internet. Most are made of fleece or soft fabric and are comfortable and washable.
- **Wear a warm but lightweight coat so you're not carrying extra weight.** Down coats are generally lighter than wool coats.
- **When walking or exercising outdoors, take breaks.** Some people find that using a cane or walking pole helps conserve energy. A lightweight cane with a folding seat attached is also helpful because you can sit and rest at any time.

Don't let cold weather keep you inside. By taking these simple steps, you can enjoy being outdoors even when Jack Frost has put a little chill in the air.



Smart SNACKING



Add chewing and swallowing to the hard work of breathing, and it's easy to understand why many people with COPD get short of breath when eating. Large meals can make this worse. A full stomach presses up against the lungs, making it hard to take a deep breath.

Be a Savvy Snacker

Smart snacking can save you from this double whammy. It will keep your energy level up, too. And healthy snack foods have nutrients to help fight off infections.

You need every calorie you consume to work for you. When you think "snack," focus on protein foods, dairy products, vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Protein is key because it prevents your breathing muscles from weakening.

Simple, Super Snacks

These snacks are nutritious, simple to fix, and easy to eat:

- Hot or cold whole-grain cereal with fruit and milk
- Low-fat or nonfat yogurt, granola, and sliced peaches
- Scrambled egg and whole wheat toast
- Whole-grain toaster waffle with peanut butter
- Whole wheat English muffin with low-fat ricotta cheese
- Low-fat cottage cheese and fruit
- Half a turkey sandwich
- Low-fat cheese and whole wheat crackers
- Chicken vegetable soup or clam chowder
- High-protein smoothie: Blend 6 ounces milk, 2 tablespoons dry powdered milk, 2 teaspoons honey, and ½ cup soft fruit (banana, peaches, or berries).

Try eating six small meals during the day. By snacking smart, you may find that you breathe more easily and have more energy.

Asparagus with Lemon

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 2 lb. asparagus, tough ends trimmed
- 2 tsp. olive oil
- 2 tbsp. lemon juice
- Black pepper to taste

Directions

Place asparagus in a steamer basket over boiling water. Cover saucepan and steam for five minutes or until bright green and tender. Rinse asparagus under cold water and drain thoroughly. Combine oil and lemon juice in a bowl. Pour over asparagus. Season with pepper to taste. Serve at room temperature if desired.

Per Serving

Calories 70, Calories from fat 20, Total fat 3 g (Saturated fat 0 g), Cholesterol 0 mg, Sodium 0 mg, Total carbohydrate 9 g, Dietary fiber 5 g, Sugars 4 g, Protein 5 g

This recipe is from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



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