What Is a COPD Action Plan? And How Can it Help Me?

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Can a COPD Action Plan Help Me?

Whether you are a newly diagnosed COPD patient or have been living with COPD for some time a COPD action plan is a must. Do you have an action plan or a management plan? In this article, I will discuss my plans and how they differ.

Why Do We Need a COPD Action Plan?

Our healthcare professionals are here to help us manage our disease, but they cannot be with us all the time. This is why it's important for COPD patients to learn about self-management of their disease and why action plans are a crucial part of managing your condition.

Those times when we can't get to see our healthcare professionals and our COPD symptoms are worsening are the times we need to have a COPD action plan in place. For me, it's important not only to have an Action Plan but to have a COPD management plan.

A management plan is how we manage our disease on a day to day basis. It's how we keep our disease stable and how we strive to improve our quality of life. By adhering to a properly thought out management plan, we can limit the times we have to resort to our Action plan. So, what is the difference I hear you ask?

What Is a COPD Action Plan?

When I think of an action plan, I think of what do I need to do if I notice my symptoms worsening? Am I getting an infection or is there something else with is affecting the way I feel.

A COPD action plan should be a plan set out in consultation with your healthcare professional and take into account your particular COPD. A generic plan is not going work, as to how you manage your disease may differ to others.

Any good Action plan should give you clear easy to follow instructions for those times you are noticing a change in your symptoms. You should also know the warning signs of an impending COPD exacerbation. This could be an increase in breathlessness, an abnormal amount of coughing, increased phlegm production. Be on the lookout for cold and flu symptoms as well.

It's important to try and identify the cause of your symptoms if you can. Pollution through environmental factors can often cause a worsening of symptoms. If local authorities are conducting burn offs in your area there are strategies, and you can use to remedy the effects. Closing windows and doors to keep fumes out, leaving the area until the fires are put out. These are just a couple of examples of how you can remove the trigger of your flare up before it gets out of hand.

My doctor has incorporated an increase in inhaled medication if my symptoms worsen. It's not uncommon for doctors to provide prescriptions for antibiotics and prednisone for patients to keep on hand.

My plan has a list of symptoms to look for and my first response to alleviate those symptoms. If you find the symptoms such as breathlessness is coming on quickly, it's important to sit down and regain your breath. Make sure you have a phone with you when sitting down just in case you cannot suppress your symptoms.

Breathing techniques are a good way to control your breathlessness and should be part of your management plan. If you are not familiar with breathing techniques, then talk to your healthcare professional about programs where you can learn these techniques.

If you haven't sat down with your healthcare professional to formulate a COPD action plan, then there's no time like the present.

Is a COPD Management Plan Different From an Action Plan?

For me, an action plan is very different to a management plan. A good COPD management plan that is strictly adhered to can minimize the use of your action plan.

Since I was diagnosed with severe COPD seven years ago, I have completed Ironman events and marathons. Many people have asked how can you do this with COPD? I put my quality of life down to my COPD management plan. This is a plan which I strictly adhere to in my everyday life.

I call my management plan the four pillars of living well with COPD. Those of you who have followed my journey will be well aware of these pillars. Knowledge, medication, nutrition, and exercise are part of my everyday life and are the reasons I rarely have to revert to my COPD Action Plan.

COPD is an inflammatory disease, and we can best attack this inflammation through taking our medications and eating foods which are anti-inflammatory. We also know exercise in any form can improve a patient's pulmonary function. Exercising in a group, by yourself or through a pulmonary rehabilitation program is a must in your management plan.

Knowledge about your disease is a very powerful tool and should never stop learning. In my experience the more knowledge you can gain the better you will manage your disease.

Will a COPD Action Plan Really Make a Difference?

Some of you might think this sounds like a lot of hard work, and I can't be bothered. But trust me, it's worth it. If you are sitting at home constantly breathless and continually visiting your doctor and hospital, then maybe it's time to reassess the way you manage your disease.

If you have patient friends who are doing well with their disease than ask them what their secrets are. It's likely they are managing their disease well. I have patient friends who have been able to exceed their doctor's expectations due to their willingness to adhere to a stringent management plan.

If you're a patient without a plan, make a note to talk to your doctor about putting something in place. Doctors love to see patients taking more responsibility for their disease management and will embrace your initiative.