Caring for Someone With COPD

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Tips for Caring for Someone With COPD

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, can become debilitating in later stages. A person with COPD will require help from family and other loved ones at this time. The right treatment and support can minimize symptoms, help reduce the chance of exacerbations, and improve the patient's quality of life.

If your loved one has COPD, you should familiarize yourself with the symptoms of poorly controlled COPD, including:

- Shortness of breath, especially with exertion
- Coughing up phlegm frequently
- Wheezing

Some of the things you may do as a COPD caregiver include:

Encourage Pulmonary Rehabilitation

Not only should your loved one attend pulmonary rehab, but you should as well. You will be encouraging him or her to go by attending yourself. Rehab helps to improve symptoms of COPD by increasing strength, providing nutritional counseling, and prescribing exercises. Disease education is taught as well.

Help With Medications

If your loved one is weak and/or having trouble with tracking all the medications they need to take, you may need to help with keeping a record. A chart listing the medications, dosages, and times that they should be taken can be very helpful for this. Check off the medications as they are given.

Write Down Questions

If you or your loved one has questions before a doctors appointment, be sure to write them down in a journal. This will help you keep track of the issues you want to have addressed at the next visit. Be sure to ask about how to use prescribed equipment like a nebulizer if you do not know already.

Attend Doctors Appointments

It is helpful to go to doctors appointments so that you know exactly what the doctor says. Sometimes, a patient may forget what was said or what the responses were to questions. You will be able to help fill in the blanks if you attend as well. Additionally, you may have some questions of your own to ask the healthcare provider.

Monitor The Condition

You should ask your loved one’s doctor about the warning signs of a COPD exacerbation and when to seek medical attention. Take them to a doctor if you notice:

- Excessive shortness of breath during everyday activities
- Increased coughing or pain in the chest with coughing
- More mucus coming up than usual
- Appearance of mucus has changed
- Increased swelling in the hands or feet
- Muscle cramping
- Extreme fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping because of shortness of breath