How to Cope With Visitors With COPD

by ERIC PATTERSON

Managing Your Social Life and Visitors With COPD

It doesn't take long for you to notice how much chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) affects your life. Sure, COPD will make your physical health suffer as you struggle to keep up with your daily activities, but your physical health is not the only thing at risk.

COPD is connected to your mental health as well. Many people will report an increased level of depression and/or anxiety when the disease is diagnosed or as symptoms worsen.

Social Health

What about your social health? Social health is your ability to have fulfilling and rewarding relationships with the valued people in your life.

Your social health is closely tied to your physical and mental health. As positive issues influence one aspect of your health, the other facets may improve — and the opposite is also true.

For example, if your COPD worsens, it can trigger new problems with your mental or social health. Because of this, your social health must be strengthened to withstand whatever your COPD and mental health can throw at you.

Boosting Self-Worth

It may seem counterintuitive, but the best way to start working on your social health is through establishing and building your self-esteem. Whether the COPD diagnosis is old or new, it has a way of wearing down your confidence.

You may begin to feel like life is over, you are past your prime, and there is nothing left to live for. Clearly, these thoughts will have a very negative influence on your self-esteem.

But what does self-esteem have to do with relationships?

Think about it this way: would you want to be friends with someone plagued by low self-esteem? When your self-esteem is terribly low, are you interested in spending time with friends?

You'll have more relationships, and ones of a better quality, when all parties have an appropriate level of confidence and self-esteem. As a person with COPD, your goal will be to maintain or increase your worth by:

- Accepting your COPD diagnosis.
- Realizing this does not mean the end of your social health.

- Focusing on the activities and interests that are still possible rather than the ones you can no longer do.
- Seeing yourself as a multifaceted person with many positive qualities.

Addressing Stigma

The previous section discussed you labeling yourself following your COPD diagnosis. This section discusses the way others in your life might label you. When a group of people label and devalue another group of people, they are stigmatizing that group.

COPD faces high amounts of social stigma because many people blame the individual for developing the disease. It also occurs because the general public might not understand the condition and be concerned about the effects.

The best you can do for yourself and your circle of supports is to state the truth about the condition, how you developed it, and how it affects your life. Choosing not to discuss the impact is a mistake that creates a barrier between you and your supports.

When discussing COPD, be sure to include:

- What the condition is
- How people get it
- How you were diagnosed with it
- The associated limitations
- What you can do in spite of it
- How they can assist your progress

Managing Visitors

When COPD symptoms persist and intensify, your abilities will decrease. Less time will be spent outside of the home engaging in activities you enjoy and more time inside treating your symptoms.

This means if you wish to maintain your social relationships, you must increase your comfort with the idea of visitors coming into the home as this will serve as your primary socialization.

Some people with COPD will resist this for various reasons including:

- Embarrassment and shame of state of physical health.
- Embarrassment of home condition due to decreased ability to clean and complete chores.
- Fear of being judged by supports.
- Inability to engage in previously enjoyed activities.

Without strong social health, your COPD and related mental health issues will continue to worsen.

To increase your social health, you must begin to confront these areas of resistance. By doing so, you will be more open to visitors, which will make you more open to socialization.

Dealing With Embarrassment

To address the issues of embarrassment, you must work to move through the grief and loss linked to your condition. Acceptance is the goal here, and it is achieved through a clear understanding of your limitations.

You will not be in the same condition you were in before diagnosis, and neither will your home. You may become uncomfortable from simple tasks like running the vacuum or dusting — that is natural and expected.

Your loved ones will not be concerned with the state of your home if you describe the situation to them. When you

accept your COPD, embarrassment will fade.

If you are still experiencing fear of judgment, consider returning to the self-esteem and stigma sections to note ways you can reduce your fear and perceptions of judgment. If the person in your life is actively judging you, you may need to move them out of the support category.

A true support will be reassuring and caring while maintaining a nonjudgmental attitude. You may not be able to avoid all the negatives in your life, but reducing contact with some can lead to better relationships with others.

It is true may not be able to head out for hikes in the woods or scale to the upper deck of the stadium, but you can still find pleasurable activities with your supports. The only limitations will be your creativity and your own frustrations with yourself.

The best relationships are based on the people in them, not the things they do. Try experimenting with different options until success can be realized.

COPD does not mean an end of socialization. It does mean a shift in self-esteem and social stigma, though.

To combat this, address these directly before moving towards a rewarding visit with your support. The theme throughout is acceptance. By accepting COPD, your limitations, and your future, you can guarantee it is worth looking forward to.