Five Tips for Parenting With COPD

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Parenting With COPD: Being a Parent With COPD

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a major cause of disability and, though mild at the beginning, COPD progression over time can significantly limit your ability to do basic activities like walking and cooking.

What if you also have children or teenagers to take care of? You need to think, plan and organize your life, and don’t let the disease take control of you. Learn how to take control of the symptoms and so you are able to raise your children. Consider the following tips for making parenting with COPD easier:

Explain What COPD Is

The first step to parenting with COPD is to explain what COPD is to your children. While they may have a basic understanding of your condition, educating your children will help them have knowledge of how COPD affects you.

You can begin with the symptoms of COPD you experience, what exacerbates your COPD symptoms, and information about your COPD treatment plan. It's best if you introduce new information a little bit each time, as too much information may confuse or may be forgotten. Likewise, if your children are too young to understand, you don't need to go too in-depth with explaining what your condition is – as long as your children know what they should be aware of (i.e., triggers, symptoms) – that should be enough.

Lastly, be sure to show them your COPD action plan in case an emergency arises that you can not take charge of. Having them know where your COPD action plan is and steps to take may prevent further complications.

Think About Yourself First

You can't help your children if you are not in good physical and emotional shape.

A big problem associated with COPD is lack of energy. Trying to keep up with day-to-day activities can be hard and tiring. Use energy-conserving techniques so you will have more energy to spend with your children.

For example, plan your activities ahead of time (i.e., taking your child to a game or school), and give yourself some extra time to rest before and/or after if needed. Rest for 20 – 30 minutes after each meal. Simplify routine tasks such as shaving, bathing or dressing by using assistive devices and tools (i.e., shower chair, hand-held shower head, dressing sticks).

Energy conservation techniques are often part of a rehab program, which is something you should consider attending in addition to your treatment. Most programs are based on the six “P” principles:

- Prioritize your activities

- Plan your schedule
- Pace yourself
- Proper position
- Pursed lip breathing
- Positive attitude

Stay Active

Stay active and teach your child that staying fit is important. You don’t have to give up the idea that you are an active, athletic mom or dad because of your COPD; you can still get involved in athletic activities your children may be involved in.

There will be times when you feel tired or your symptoms will not allow you to exercise, but start slowly and aim to exercise at least 20 – 30 minutes, three to four times a week. Include stretching exercises, cardiovascular and aerobic (like walking, jogging, swimming) and strengthening exercises. Focus on strengthening exercises for the upper body because these are beneficial to keeping your respiratory muscles strong and fit.

Plan to work out with your child — for example, go swimming or jogging with them.

Ask for Help

Whether you ask your spouse, a parent or a friend, you should consider getting some help. You may not feel well enough to go grocery shopping, help with homework, or take your son or daughter to their baseball game.

Don’t be afraid to ask for help when you need it. Make a list with everyone you can count on, and delegate specific tasks for them.

Plan Your Finances

COPD may have an impact on how much or for how long you can work, and you may need time off work. This could translate into spending more time at home with your child, but will affect your financial life. See a financial advisor and look into various options for additional income (such as various investments, stock market, etc).

For financial assistance, contact your local lung association (i.e., the American Lung Association), as they can provide some resources for COPD sufferers (mainly air conditioners and help with medication costs). When your child applies to a college, talk to the high school guidance counselor to find out available scholarships and grants.