Helpful COPD Products

by ANGELA FINLAY

Products to Make Living With COPD Easier

Living with COPD isn't easy, but your actions and treatment choices will determine just how difficult your daily routine will be. Fortunately, there are dozens of COPD products that work to open your airways and loosen mucus, which is guaranteed to improve your comfort.

However, different devices work in different ways, and some might suit you better than others. From inhalers and oxygen to clever additions to your living space, consider which COPD aids will help your symptoms and routine the most.

Respiratory Devices to Clean and Protect Your Lungs

The best breathing aids use pressure, vibration, sound, or medication to help rid your body of irritants and improve your lung function. You may find relief in any one of these medically-approved products, but many COPD patients can use more than one for even more relief:

- **Expiratory pressure devices.** The technique known as positive expiratory pressure therapy (PEP) uses resistance to help you clear your airways: you breathe in through a mask, tube or other mechanism, then you exhale through a small, tight passageway that creates pressure in your lungs to loosen mucus. Both the Acapella and Flutter devices work with the PEP principle.
- **Oscillating vest.** Vibration is another way to loosen your mucus, especially when the vibration is constant and targeted. The Medpulse Respiratory Vest System or the Vest Airway Clearance System are both designed to hug your torso and massage your chest wall to physically move the mucus from your airways.
- **Acoustic devices.** Pressure and massage have obvious benefits, but sound can also help loosen mucus. This type of device is almost a combination of vibration and PEP: by exhaling through a small tube, your breath causes a small reed to flutter, and that sends low-frequency sound waves down into your airways and through the mucus buildup. The Lung Flute is the most common brand, and has won a lot of praise from the medical community.
- **Portable oxygen.** If your COPD is bad, your doctor may suggest that you carry extra oxygen to help you move and breathe more comfortably. It's not for everyone (treatment is generally reserved for those at risk of heart failure because of low arterial pressure), and since oxygen is highly flammable, you must be extra cautious around heat sources.

- **Nebulizers.** Using compressed air or ultrasonic power, nebulizers create a mist of medicine for you to inhale. They typically involve measuring a portion of liquid medicine, connecting it to the machine, and then breathing normally for 20 minutes or so. It's not a difficult or uncomfortable process, but nebulizers aren't portable – this is a treatment to use at home.
- **Inhalers.** These handy devices have several advantages: they're easy to use, extremely portable, fast-acting, and personalized to deliver the perfect type and amount of medicine for your unique symptoms and requirements. There are three main types of inhalers, and your doctor will determine whether a metered-

dose inhaler (MDI), a dry powder inhaler (DPI), or a soft mist inhaler (SMI) is the best choice for you.

I’s not enough to find the proper inhaler or breathing aid; you need to use the device properly to get the benefits you’re looking for. Respiratory therapists can show you how exactly how to use the breathing tool, including the right and wrong techniques, and signs that the device may not be working correctly.

Next page: three other products to help make life more comfortable.

Other Products to Make Life Comfortable

There’s no doubt that good COPD treatment will include some breathing aids, but other types of devices can help you approach your symptoms in other ways. In fact, you gain a significant advantage over your illness when you use a variety of measures to protect your body, relieve stress, and improve your surroundings:

Air Purifiers for a Cleaner Home

You can’t always detect toxins in the air, and they can accumulate in an enclosed space. Allergens, irritants, and bacteria will inflame your airways, and quickly lead to an exacerbation and further lung damage.

Luckily, a few simple devices can go far to keeping the air in your home clean. Since humidity breeds mold, mildew and bacteria, run a dehumidifier in your living space, and remember to clean it out regularly. You might also like to add an air purifier that has been certified by the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers – many people find that compact, quiet HEPA filters are very good at reducing airborne irritants, and are well worth the cost.

Mobility Aids to Save Energy

The less you demand of your body, the less pressure you put on your lungs. In turn, anything to help you carry your weight and alleviate strain will help you breathe easier. You’ve likely heard about the advantage of exercise for your COPD symptoms, and your longevity. It’s absolutely true – the more active you are, the more you will strengthen and protect your respiratory system.

But you don’t have to battle gravity all on your own. You can use devices like hiking or walking poles, shoes that promote an easy, heel-to-toe step, or even a wheeled walker if you’re having trouble supporting yourself. The important point is that you keep moving (no matter how slowly).

A Smart Phone with Helpful Apps

COPD exacerbations can hit quickly, and hit hard. Keep important numbers in your phone and your phone by your side; be sure to place it on your bedside table in case an emergency strikes in the night and you need to act quickly.

But your phone can do more than dial important numbers, and you should take advantage of all those resources at your fingertips. There are all sorts of smartphone apps for chronic conditions, and although most COPD apps are geared towards health professionals, there are other tools that can help patients track and report their symptoms and concerns.

Chronic pain apps that include a daily journal feature are perfect, and if you find one that lets you track and chart your symptoms weekly, you can take even more control in your healthcare management.