COPD and Anger

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Coping With Feelings of Anger

A COPD diagnosis can be scary, and affects different people in different ways. Anger is a very common response. But is anger confined just to the patient, or does it spread wider and encompass family members and caregivers?

Plenty of Reasons to Get Angry

COPD and anger often go hand in hand. From the moment we're diagnosed with COPD we have to make adjustments to how we live. As the disease progresses, so do the limitations. Before long, we're faced with the realization that we can no longer do many things we once took for granted – we now rely on others. Have you had a grandchild ask why you can't kick a ball with them or go for a walk to the park? COPD patients miss out on many things healthy people don't think twice about, which can be a major source of frustration and anger.

Another cause of anger is a lack of understanding about COPD from people in our lives, including family or friends who just don't get what we're going through. Many patients diagnosed in the early stages of COPD can seem quite well when they're in an everyday environment, particularly if their job doesn't involve physical exertion. At this stage, friends or colleagues can start to question if there's a problem – we "don't look sick," so it can't be too bad.

Anger is an understandable response to realizing people think you're fine and not working hard for every breath. Most people who meet me for the first time have no idea I have severe COPD, as my fitness level is such that I don't seem breathless, but people who know me well and spend the most time with me have seen me at my worst.

Many people turn to the internet to look for answers and miracle cures after being diagnosed, but this can cause anger and upset, too. I promote the use of online resources, which are usually a great way to gain knowledge and build support networks. However, in the early days of being diagnosed when you don't know what to look for, you can also find plenty of COPD doom and gloom.

I've also seen patients become angry at information telling them how to live their lives, written by someone with no idea of the day-to-day challenges of COPD. That's why some of the most valuable advice on COPD you can get is from people who have experienced it.

Some patients have the added stress of financial constraints and can't afford to see a specialist or medication cost is out of their reach. Luckily for me, Australia has a great health system, but health systems vary between countries and, for many, there is no safety net.

So, with COPD putting limits on what we do, a lack of understanding from friends and family, reading all the bad things about how the disease progresses, plus the pressure of financial constraints, is it any wonder patients can

become angry?

Next page: the impact of anger on loved ones and how to deal with your anger

The Domino Effect: Impacting Our Loved Ones

How many of us find ourselves in a state of frustration or anger when first diagnosed and faced with all these limitations? How else do we react?

We all react in different ways and our natures will dictate how it plays out. However, as it all unravels, we do need to take time to consider how our reaction effects the ones around us: our family, friends and carers. It can be a vicious cycle – we're struggling to deal with the changes in our lives which in turn impacts on the people around us. Before we know it the household is under stress and unable to deal with the challenges that lie ahead.

I found managing my COPD was a little like running my business in that, as a patient, it's important to show leadership to those around you. Why? People will generally respond to strength and if you take the lead and be positive about how you manage your condition, the people around you will do the same.

Likewise, if you're not proactive and are not looking after yourself, those same people will start to get frustrated and possibly angry with you. If you've ever gone out of your way to help someone only to see them not make the most of what you've done, you'll know what I mean.

Every now and then, people with COPD need to take a step back and look at how their COPD affects the ones they love. While we don't want to feel like a burden, the fact is, we rely on others to help out. Now, more than ever, it's important to communicate with people around you so if there's any frustrations or anger building, it can be addressed before things get out of hand.

As patients we ask for understanding that we can't do everything we used to, or that it takes longer to do it, so we need to understand how that impacts loved ones. When I was diagnosed I told my wife that I didn't want to be treated like an invalid, and just wanted to be treated like anyone else. She found that difficult because a good partner fusses over the person they love. I found *that* difficult, but have recently come to understand how hard it must be for her.

Dealing With Your Anger

How you deal with anger and frustration can have a bearing on how your COPD journey will go, and how much help you'll have along the way. People will be willing to help you if you're willing to help yourself and that's the reality.

For me, the first step was accepting that I had COPD and my life was going to be different – not bad, just different. I had to change the way I did certain things in day-to-day life. The second step was to learn as much as possible about my disease. By gaining knowledge about COPD, we can better understand its effects on us and put strategies in place to enable us to live a good quality of life.

My wife and I did a lot of reading and investigated different treatment options, some good and some not so good. We never looked at COPD as a death sentence like some people do, we just adjusted our lifestyle to better deal with this disease.

Gaining knowledge cannot be underestimated. Much of the frustration associated with COPD comes from a lack of knowledge, so it's important that when you're diagnosed with COPD that you ask your doctor for as much information as possible. By doing this, you can begin your journey well-armed and with some direction on how you will deal with what may lay ahead.

We've talked about the strategies we need to put in place in previous articles to make our quality of life better, but

before we can we have to gain that knowledge to allow us to do this.