COPD and Headaches

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Ways to Avoid Morning Headaches

If you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, you may find that you have frequent morning headaches. These headaches can be caused by a few things related to a buildup of carbon dioxide in your body at night, and lack of oxygen during that time. Breathing decreases during sleep so this leads to these problems.

Hypoxia is a condition where oxygen intake is too low. This can be addressed by your doctor prescribing oxygen therapy. Headaches caused by hypoxia are usually taken care of when the patient gets oxygen during sleep time.

Sleep apnea will also cause headaches in people with COPD. Again, this condition leads to hypoxia and morning headaches. A continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine helps to keep the airways in the body open so that there is air exchange.

Studies have shown that the CPAP can reduce the chance of death in patients with COPD and sleep apnea. A sleep study can help determine if you suffer from sleep apnea.

Symptoms

Headaches can greatly vary in duration and severity. They can be caused by many things, so it may be difficult to know if they are from COPD. One thing to recognize is that if your headaches are in the morning upon rising, it is a good chance it is from poor oxygenation at night. Some symptoms that may accompany your headaches are:

- Chest pain
- Wheezing
- Extreme shortness of breath
- Choking upon waking up
- Rapid breathing
- Low oxygen reading

Prevention of Headaches Associated with COPD

Since there number one reason you may be experiencing headaches is lack of oxygen, you will want to do all you can to improve your air flow. You need to do this not only for the headaches, but for your overall health. Here are some things you can do to improve your oxygenation and avoid those morning headaches:

- **Quit smoking –** I know, you hear this all the time, but smoke is only going to decrease air flow to your lungs.
- **Use your bronchodilators –** You need to use your inhalers to keep inflammation at bay.
- **Invest in a good pillow –** You will need a nice, firm pillow to use at bedtime so that your head is elevated. This position improves airflow to your lungs.

- **Eat food that helps reduce headaches –** Did you know there are certain foods that help with preventing headaches? These foods help relax blood vessels in the body and the brain. Eat more cashews, brown rice, almonds, and peas.
- **Exercise your lungs –** Any exercise that elevates your heart rate and allows you to take in more air will help strengthen your lungs. Healthier lungs will take in more oxygen when you are sleeping, so exercise is a great benefit.
- **Watch the caffeine –** You don’t want to quit drinking your caffeine abruptly; this will cause your headaches. Don’t change your caffeine intake. If you don’t drink beverages with caffeine, don’t start either.

Morning headaches caused by COPD can be effectively treated if you know the underlying reason why you are not getting enough oxygen at night. By practicing many of the interventions mentioned, these headaches will soon be a thing of the past.