9 Tips for Being a COPD Caregiver

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Caring for a Loved One With COPD

You have seen the signs for a while. The coughing has been worse. The shortness of breath and the wheezing have been troubling. The changes in energy level have you up at night with worry. Now you can admit it, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is impacting your life, and these symptoms are not even yours.

Whether COPD is targeting your grandparent, parent, spouse or friend, it is a negative force. It significantly interrupts your relationship with the ill person, and in turn, disturbs your own mood and psychological well-being.

You begin to base your feelings on their feelings. When they are doing well, you will feel relief, at ease and peaceful. When their symptoms are worse, you will feel increased apprehension, depression and overall stress.

Of course, the focus during COPD treatment should be on the patient. Taking steps to decrease their symptoms while improving their quality of life is a must. Pay attention to yourself, though. If you are a COPD caregiver, you will need to care for yourself as much as you care for them. If you cannot take care of yourself, how can you possibly take care of anyone else?

The caretaker role is extremely important while being extremely challenging, draining and frustrating at times. Help yourself to help them. Here's how:

1. Make the Choice

Do you want to be a caretaker for someone with COPD? Oftentimes, people become thrust into a caretaker role without even realizing it because other people leave a space that you fill.

Refuse to let other people take advantage of your kindness or manipulate you into something that you are not comfortable doing. Being a caregiver is a monumental task and one that you should not take lightly.

2. Get Educated

COPD is a chronic medical condition that is still not well understood by many people. Gaining an understanding of the illness gives you information that you can leverage into good decision making with the patient.

COPD is not one disease. It is actually an umbrella term used when discussing several diseases including emphysema, chronic bronchitis, refractory asthma and some bronchiectasis. Talking to your loved one's doctor about what factors contribute to their COPD is a great way to put your situation into a manageable perspective.

Next page: setting goals and boundaries.

3. Set a Goal

Having goals and expectations based in reality will save you valuable resources. Think about what is realistic now and what is realistic in the long-term. Can you really work a fulltime job, take care of your kids and care for your ailing loved one simultaneously?

Goals should also be specific to focus on the level of commitment that you are prepared to give. It seems that doing all of this will increase your stress and decrease your overall wellbeing.

Avoid saying something like, “I’ll do whatever it takes.” This stance could come back to bite you in the future. If you set your expectations too high, you feel failure and disappointment when the goal is not accomplished.

Clearly list what role you are comfortable taking. Revise this list often and avoid being too rigid. Realistic and specific goals wills change as the symptoms and functioning of your loved one changes.

4. Solidify Your Boundaries

The best way to protect yourself in this process is by implementing good boundaries. Boundaries keep up separated and removed from other people.

People with weak boundaries are usually more passive and allow others to use their kindness. People with good boundaries say “no” in situations that are problematic without feeling guilty or selfish. They are interested in the long-term accomplishment of the goal.

If the journey of COPD is new to you, establish rigid boundaries and take care to say “yes” when only when confident in your choice. Too many people feel more comfortable saying “yes” early on while not expressing their true thoughts and feelings.

This creates problems later, though, as others begin to expect certain things from you. It is far easier to loosen boundaries later than it is to tighten them.

5. Be Selfish

This is not a typo. It may sound shocking, but it is actually normal and healthy to be focused on you when caring for others. Find time for yourself. Find ways to recharge and recuperate in your downtime.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that best way to relax is staring at the TV from the couch or taking endless naps. These coping skills are more neutral or negative than positive. Focus your energies towards seeking out positive experiences with uplifting people.

Go pleasurable places, eat a good meal and get a massage. Find some way to bring humor and laughter into your life. Things have been serious lately so finding ways to shift your focus will be rewarding and revitalizing.

6. Be Holistic

In this case, holistic means paying attention to all aspects of your life in its entirety. If the only focus you have is on your loved one with COPD, the other facets will suffer. Attention to the older generation will result in fewer resources available to the younger generation.

Spend time with your children to maintain an effective relationship. Balance work with home life by using high levels of clear, assertive communication at your place of employment.

Being a caretaker is a juggling act. Keep all your balls in the air. If one is dropped, the whole process will waver.

Next page: being aware and seeking therapy.

7. Be a Team

Providing any level of care for someone with COPD is an intense job. Doing it alone puts you at risk. Accept help and assistance often, even if it is uncomfortable for you. If none has been offered, use your best assertive communication to ask for help.

Asking for help does not mean you are failing. The only failure is allowing yourself to suffer. If you continue to be denied, it may be time for professional help in the form of visiting nurses or a changed living situation.

This is not giving up. It is, in fact, a commitment to provide best level of care for your loved one. You deserve it and they deserve it.

8. Beware of Burnout

Burnout is a major concern for anyone dealing with the COPD of a loved one. Overexerting yourself and draining all of your physical, emotional and financial resources caring for others cause burnout.

Even if you follow these tips precisely, caregiver burnout can still walk into your life. Burnout can bring symptoms of depression and anxiety as feelings of worry or powerlessness intensify.

Track yourself and your symptoms. Sleep, diet and exercise will be good indicators of your burnout level. Look for extremes and drastic changes.

For example, if you sleep for 14 hours on the weekend and only four hours during the week, depression could be an issue. Additionally, if eating makes you nauseous, anxiety may be taking its toll.

Burnout prevention is crucial because once the burnout begins, coming back is quite difficult.

9. Find Therapy

You are taking care of your loved one. Who is taking care of you? Just as finding alternative assistance for your loved one is not an admittance of failure, seeking therapy for yourself is not a failure.

Any time you can accurately identify your needs, you are taking the appropriate step. A therapist can work with you to modify your thoughts, feelings and behaviors to improve your wellbeing.

Therapy can offer you a break from your daily routine while providing an opportunity to reflect on your life. This break can provide a much-needed change in perspective and renewed hope.

Conclusion

Being a caregiver to anyone with a chronic medical condition is a task whose importance is only matched by its difficulty. Consider the above options as a guide to maintaining your physical and mental health in the face of your loved one’s illness. Make self-preservation your goal to ensure health and happiness for those around you.