COPD Guilt and How to Control It

by RUSSELL WINWOOD

Moving Past Guilt Associated With COPD

Do you carry guilt due to your COPD diagnosis? Unfortunately many patients do for various reasons, and this guilt can be very destructive. But when we think about it, does guilt serve any real purpose?

Why Do Patients Carry Guilt?

There are various reasons why someone would carry around guilt as a result of their COPD diagnosis. Some common reasons for COPD guilt include feeling dependent on other people and becoming unable to do certain things. But perhaps the most common cause for guilt and regret is poor lifestyle choices of the past — namely, smoking.

Many people with chronic illness have unfortunately ended up with their disease through poor lifestyle choices. Heart disease, stroke and respiratory disease are the largest causes of death in the world today. While some patients contract these diseases through genetic or environmental factors, the majority of people will be diagnosed with one or more of these diseases due to poor lifestyle choices.

Does that mean that someone with a poor diet deserves heart disease or stroke? No! So isn't it fair to say that someone who has smoked doesn't deserve respiratory disease? Both can be traced back to lifestyle choices.

Some people would argue that we know smoking isn't good for us. I would argue that it's well known eating excessive amounts of unhealthy food isn't good for you, too. The diseases may be different, but the cause in most occasions will be the same — poor decisions.

I would dare to say there isn't a person on this planet who hasn't made poor decisions in life. I am an ex-smoker who was overweight and consumed too much alcohol. I don't feel guilty about my choices as they all played a part of who I am today. That said, do I wish I didn't make those choices? Without a doubt!

Is Someone Making You Feel This Way?

Sometimes the people closest to you can make you feel guilty by constantly reminding you what caused your condition. I've heard of people telling patients that "COPD that is a smoker’s disease — you deserve it!" With attitudes like that no wonder some patients feel guilty.

If someone in your life is making you feel guilty maybe it's time to sit down and talk to them, find out why they feel it necessary to make you feel this way. Sometimes people just need to be educated. Often bias is caused by a lack of knowledge.

I like to spend my time with positive people, as they are not only be a good influence, but they are also less likely to judge you.

Next page: tips for managing feelings of COPD guilt.

Tips for Controlling Feelings of Guilt

We all have different personalities and deal with life struggles the best we know how. If you're finding that guilt is consuming you then it's time to do some self-assessment. Consider these tips for coping with and moving past your feelings of guilt.

Focus on What You Can Do

Do you look around the house at what needs to be done but just can't find the energy to do it, and then feel guilty about either not being able to contribute or for relying on someone to help you? Is playing with your kids/grandkids beyond you?

This sort of thing can feed guilt, especially if you are used to being independent. While you may not like it, this is your life now and accepting that and focusing on the things you *can* do is a far better use of your time.

You may not be able to run around with the kids, but there are other activities you can do that don't involve physical exertion — reading stories, playing board games and face painting just to name a few.

Give Back

If giving back helps you deal with guilt then look at what you can offer the people in your life who are helping you through. We all need help from time to time, whether that's physical or emotional. Understanding what you can and can't do is all a part of easing the guilt, and therefore changing a negative state of mind to a positive one.

Identify what it is you can offer. It may be as simple as listening to their problems, giving advice or helping them sort out household bills and shopping lists. With the rise of online shopping, ask if you can help with purchasing products online; these days you can go grocery shopping from your computer. These are just a few suggestions, but I'm sure you can think of more.

Adopt a Positive Outlook

In reality guilt is an emotion you put on yourself and while people may try to make you feel guilty, you choose to feel the guilt. Try reconciling your feelings by focusing on the positive steps you take in dealing with your disease — being positive can be addictive.

Remember it doesn't matter how you came to have COPD. You didn't ask for it. Try not to focus on what you could have done better in the past, as we are all smarter with hindsight. Learn about your disease so you are able to better educate the people who are down on you.

If we are to change people's attitudes on how they perceive COPD patients we need to firstly look at how we perceive ourselves. If you're feeling sorry for yourself and being proactive with your health, people are more likely to have a negative view of your situation. If you accept your past choices are a contributing factor to your COPD and take positive steps to improve your health and quality of life in spite of your disease, people tend to have a more positive response to you.

I remember a few years ago watching a program about Nick Vijicic, who was born with no arms and no legs, and how he adapted to life and what he has achieved. One part of the interview showed him playing golf — it was amazing.

At no stage did I feel sorry for Nick. I felt nothing but admiration for him and his outlook on life. Nick can't run around with his son or do other things most people take for granted, but he has learned how to adapt to life as a husband and a father.

Nick has shown that it's important to be thankful for our abilities and to focus less on our disabilities, a message that can certainly help when dealing with guilt.