Managing Mornings With COPD

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Mornings With COPD: Tips to Reduce Discomfort, Improve Breathing, and More

Coughing, mucus, and breathlessness are regular annoyances when you live with COPD, but they can be even more difficult to handle in the mornings.

After you've been resting for several hours, mucus will have accumulated in your airways and clogged up your breathing. The result? Your oxygen intake through the night may have decreased while the pressure in your chest has increased, and that makes for breathing difficulties and a lot less energy to get on with your day.

You'll need a strategy to tackle the uncomfortable morning symptoms swiftly and thoroughly, so you can stay on track and get the most out of your day. Learn how to lower your expectations, plan for the inevitable, and avoid the stress of frantic mornings with COPD.

Streamline Your Morning Routine

Take a load off your lungs by adjusting your morning to suit your energy stores (and your energy needs). An honest assessment of what you can do — alongside what you *must* do — is a good place to start. Keep this in mind as you gradually increase your activity level with these tips:

Start Slowly

Starting with the simplest tasks will help you ease into your morning routine rather than sap your energy stores. Do you find showering or dressing for the day is the most challenging part of your morning? Leave it for later, once you've energized with a healthy breakfast and done some chest exercises to clear your airways and ease the discomfort.

Not surprisingly, many people with COPD find that they need to give themselves more time in the mornings to get things done. If you can wake up 30 minutes earlier, you may find it more comfortable and less stressful to stay on schedule. However, if activity is simply out of the question for the first few hours of the morning, you should consider bumping all of your work, rehab, and social obligations to later in the day.

Tend to Your Symptoms First

It's not uncommon to feel tight, weak, and virtually out of breath the moment you wake up, but if you focus on the root of the problem, you can get on with the rest of your morning much more easily.

You need to clear out the mucus that has accumulated over the course of the night. If you're not sure how best to do this, talk to your doctor right away about effective techniques, including controlled coughing: learning how to summon a strong cough is the single best way to clear the mucus away without sapping all of your energy. Other physiotherapy techniques (like postural drainage) can be helpful, too, especially when coupled with the right fast-

acting medication.

Sip Something Warm

Many patients find that a hot cup of coffee or tea is the best way to start their morning, not only for the energy boost, but also because the warmth and moisture tend to loosen mucus. Herbal remedy enthusiasts insist that black tea brings the greatest benefit, since it may be able to expand the airways and increase your natural defenses against viruses and bacteria.

Antioxidants have also been shown to decrease inflammation and improve respiratory function, so you might want to consider adding some more to your daily breakfast. Green tea is a good source, but so are many fruits and veggies: try to work in vegetable omelets now and then, and eat a variety of red and purple fruits throughout the week.

Stay One Step Ahead

The best time to prepare for the morning is before you go to bed. Since dressing can be an exhausting challenge in the morning, remember to lay out your clothes the night before, and stick to easy-to-manage styles (like elastic waistbands, flowy pullovers, and suspenders instead of belts).

Since poor sleep quality almost certainly results in less energy during the day, and could even lead to anxiety and depression, you should focus on getting the shut-eye you need with the right medication – taken at the right time. Bronchodilators can ease nighttime coughing and ease airways, but they may have a stimulating effect, which means the medicine could wake you up if you take it right before bed.

Oxygen therapy during the night can bring a big improvement to your sleep, and resulting energy. Low-tech measures can also be helpful: try stacking some pillows behind your head to help you breathe easier while you sleep.

Make Room for Rests

Staying active is important, but knowing when to rest is just as crucial for better COPD management. Sometimes, a bit of planning and rearranging can open up natural rest stops that you can use to reset and regroup.

First, try not to overload your mornings. COPD is physically taxing, and willpower will only take you so far – it’s important to know your activity limits so you don’t provoke an exacerbation. Canceling or postponing appointments is not the end of the world; be prepared to move obligations around as you need to.

Resting during your morning routine is important, too. Stools, grab bars, and well-placed chairs are your best household allies, so use them to your advantage. Bars in the shower plus a small chair will take a lot of the strain out of bathing, and a stool in the hallway or at the foot of the stairs can be a welcome stopover on the way to your next task.