Unexpected Difficulties Running Errands With COPD

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Tips for Performing Activities and Staying Well

If you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD), you know carrying out routine activities isn't as easy as it used to be. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to help you maintain your independence, perform daily activities more readily, stay well, and enjoy life more.

Shortness of Breath and Fatigue

There are many reasons certain activities may be harder than they used to be. Two of the biggest challenges you may face with your COPD are fatigue and shortness of breath — and they often occur simultaneously.

Fatigue has many causes, including the obvious: it may arise if you do not get enough sleep. You will also tire easily if you are not maintaining enough oxygen or retaining too much carbon dioxide in your body. In addition, if you do not eat a healthy diet you will be more susceptible to fatigue.

Shortness of breath may increase when you are active. It is likely to be especially pronounced when you perform activities that require you to reach over your head. If you cough frequently or have recently had an exacerbation of symptoms, you will likely feel fatigued and short of breath when you are active.

If you feel anxious about performing activities, you may experience shortness of breath and fatigue due to the energy-draining effects of anxiety. Anxiety medications may deplete your energy levels as well, as do many medications for COPD.

Identify the Problem

It is likely that difficulty performing activities, such as running errands or doing groceries, is due to a combination of causes.

Identifying the origin of obstacles is the first step to reducing or eliminating them. You may find it valuable to consult with your health care provider, particularly if you experience worsening or new onset of difficulties performing tasks.

Sometimes medication and other treatments may need to be implemented or changed. Regardless of whether your disease is in its early stages or advanced, there are treatments available to help you.

Preventing Fatigue and Shortness of Breath

Once you have identified the cause or causes of your fatigue, you will be able to take steps to manage it so you can perform everyday tasks easier.

Exercise Improves Stamina

Begin an exercise program if your health care provider agrees. Ask your doctor to recommend a physical or occupational therapy consultation.

Physical and occupational therapists are experts regarding exercise and adaptive techniques designed to make your life easier. They may also recommend equipment that will enable you to complete activities with greater ease.

Next page: what to consider before beginning an exercise program

Preventing Fatigue and Shortness of Breath

For example, you may benefit from using a grab bar to pick up objects without having to bend or reach as far as you normally do. This can be a great device to conserve your energy. They may also suggest you use a wheelchair for daily or occasional use.

Physical and occupational therapists can teach you a wide array of energy-conserving tips. Nurses and respiratory therapists will help you to perfect breathing techniques to reduce fatigue. You may benefit from using a rescue inhaler prior to performing strenuous activities.

When beginning an exercise program with your physical therapist, consider the following:

- Begin gradually.
- Choose a suitable exercise program for your current level of health.
- Walking is a great exercise.
- If you are wheelchair bound, you can still engage in an exercise program to build strength and increase your level of energy.
- By gradually enhancing your stamina, you will be able to perform activities with greater ease. You will also be able to cough up excess secretions more readily and prevent fluid from accumulating in your lungs, decreasing your risk of contracting infections.

Take Steps to Get a Good Night's Sleep

Many people who have COPD do not sleep well. This may be due to anxiety, frequent coughing, and a worsening of symptoms at night. All of these factors feed into each other and wreak havoc on sleep.

You may need an anti-anxiety medication at night or you may benefit by making changes in the environment you sleep in. Using extra pillows, a fan, or sleeping in a recliner are just a few of the many options that may help you get a better night's sleep.

Use a Portable Oxygen Tank or Compressor

If shortness of breath interferes with your ability to be active, you may need a portable oxygen unit prescribed even if you do not normally use oxygen at home.

Pushing, pulling and lifting can cause a great deal of fatigue. Having portable oxygen with you will help to ensure your tissues function optimally, affording you with opportunities to do what you want to do with greater ease. Talk with your health care provider and oxygen supplier. A wide array of compact models are available — do your research and compare portable oxygen concentrators to find which is the best for you.

Make Activities Easier

Think carefully about possible solutions for making activities easier. Take frequent breaks. Perform strenuous

activities over short periods of time, rather than in one large block.

For example, rather than combing your hair, shaving, and brushing your teeth one after another, take breaks in between each activity. If standing at the sink is too tiring for shaving, purchase an electric razor and shave while sitting down.

Next page: ways to conserve your energy so you can perform everyday tasks like running errands with COPD

Preventing Fatigue and Shortness of Breath

If brushing your hair and applying makeup is difficult, choose a simple short style, and sit at a vanity table where you can rest your elbows on the surface while you apply makeup and comb your hair.

Plan your daily activities ahead of time, and don't schedule too many activities for one day. If showering and going shopping is exhausting, try taking your shower the night before you go out instead.

Wear comfortable clothing that is easy to put on and remove if you have a busy day planned. Take advantage of meals on wheels or foods you can prepare easily.

Conserve Your Energy

Make lists and prioritize activities by importance. Are there activities you only perform out of habit? Are there more efficient ways of completing tasks than the way you currently perform them?

For example, do you go and pay bills in person when it would be easier to send checks or pay online? Do you always make meals from scratch when there are easier ways to prepare meals?

Do you really need to vacuum your floors as often as you do?

Taking shortcuts is a smart thing to do. It is much more important to conserve your breath and energy so you can enjoy life and stay healthy rather than having a picture perfect home or gourmet meal.

Shop Smart

When you grocery shop, take advantage of the free motorized shopping carts if needed. Don't be afraid to ask for help carrying groceries to your car.

Figure out whether a large shopping trip infrequently or several small trips to the grocery store works best for you. You may opt to take advantage of the large warehouse stores that sell in large quantities. Go infrequently when you have assistance to shop for bulk, cleaning and household products.

Save Energy While Doing the Laundry

Do one load of laundry rather than several. Just because large bottles of laundry soap are inexpensive, does not necessarily mean they are the best choice for you.

Use dry powders, individual packets or laundry soaps in small containers. Liquid detergent containers with spouts and do not require lifting are economical, easy-to-use options.

Be Active, Stay Well

The keys to being active and staying well with COPD are planning, increasing your general level of wellness, and careful thinking. Rather than simply completing tasks out of habit and suffering from an increase in COPD symptoms, stop and think about their causes. Then take actions which prevent and diminish your discomfort.