How to Quit Smoking With COPD

by ANGELA FINLAY

Why You Need to Quit Smoking With COPD

Tobacco smoke irritates your bronchial tubes, paralyzes your tiny filtering hairs (cilia), and damages the tiny air sacs that need to contract and expand to allow your body to take in and use oxygen. The result is a poorly functioning respiratory system and a buildup of toxic chemicals in all the passages and pockets of your lungs and airways.

Over time, this gunk in your bronchial tubes will lead to an increase in mucus production and inflammation (chronic bronchitis), and the damaged air sacs will make it very difficult to exhale stale air and take in fresh oxygen (emphysema). Bronchitis and emphysema are the two principle components of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Everyone who smokes should quit as soon as possible, but it's especially important to quit smoking with COPD. Of course, this is easier said than done, particularly if you choose to go cold turkey. Consider these quitting strategies to help you out.

Nicotine Replacement Therapy

By taking in nicotine without the smoke, a smoker can satisfy their addiction without exposing their body to the chemicals that come from the combustion (burning) of tobacco. The idea is to wean the body off of the addiction rather than simply replacing cigarettes with another drug indefinitely.

You will gradually decrease the amount of nicotine, and hopefully ease your withdrawal symptoms until you’re smoke- and nicotine-free.

Studies show nicotine replacement therapy is best for moderate to heavy smokers; those who smoke fewer than 10 cigarettes a day won’t see the same benefit. However, if you do decide to try a nicotine skin patch, gum, inhaler or nasal spray, remember your chance of success is 10 times higher if you don’t cheat on the first day of use.

Prescription Medication

There are a few different classes of prescription medication for smoking cessation, but many of the preferred drugs are anti-depressants that work by altering receptors in your brain in different ways. Some drugs aim to convince your brain that the taste or experience of smoking is no longer appealing, while others focus on easing the nicotine withdrawal symptoms. In any case, medications can be helpful, but they can also be powerful tools that may interfere with your COPD treatment.

It’s vital that you discuss all your medication options with your doctor, and whether they can be used with other stop-smoking aids like NRT. Depending on the drug, side effects can include seizures, an increased risk of heart

attack and liver damage, so it’s not a decision to be taken lightly.

Supplements and Herbs

Some natural herbs are known for their mood-enhancing properties (like St. John’s wort), which can help fight off anxiety and depression while you quit. Others may provide a soothing effect that can mimic nicotine, such as Lobelia inflata, which impacts neurotransmitter activity in two key ways: it acts like nicotine and helps to reduce the effect of nicotine when you smoke.

Many herbal remedies contain a selection of herbs to fight off the array of withdrawal symptoms, reduce cravings, and boost respiratory function. Complementary medicine can be gentle and helpful, but it can also interfere with your COPD medication, or your compromised lung capacity.

Never treat medicinal herbs as benign — do your own thorough research, and consult with more than one doctor on the matter.

Other Options to Help Quit Smoking With COPD

Although these methods to quit smoking are some of the most popular, they aren’t the only ways to give it up for good. For some people, more unorthodox strategies offer the interest, encouragement and motivation they need to stick with their goal.

In most cases, you don’t have to choose one or the other — find a quit tool that works for your personality and state of health, and combine it with a creative approach to a new lifestyle, like:

Changing Your Menu

Take your quit date as a jumping-off point for a lifestyle makeover. Begin with a new diet for COPD, since what you choose to eat and what you choose to avoid will have a strong and immediate impact on your health and energy levels.

Fruits, vegetables and dairy are known to make cigarettes taste bad, so add in as many as you can. Try fresh, crispy veggies — the big texture makes the snack more interesting and draws out the snacking experience.

Staying Active

Exercise can be difficult with COPD, but it’s one of best mechanisms for distraction. It’s physically difficult to smoke while you’re in motion, and the physical benefits and emotional release of exercise is a happy reward that can motivate you to stay active.

Even a slow, steady stroll can have powerful effects on your ability to avoid cigarettes.

Raising the Stakes

Sometimes committing to a challenge with friends or coworkers can get you excited and keep you on track. Challenge other smokers you know to a quit challenge, and have everyone contribute some money or make a sacrifice of some sort.

If everyone has something to lose (and something to win), they’re more likely to put their greatest effort forward.