Resisting the Urge to Give Up

by ERIC PATTERSON

COPD and the Temptation to Give Up

Giving up is easy. Whether you are a child learning to tie your shoes, a teenager practicing your parallel park, or an older adult trying to decode the latest piece of technology, giving up is always an available option.

It is an option plagued with negative consequences, though. Giving up means you will never accomplish your goal, and you accept that. Instead of finding success, you will be an adult with untied shoes that skips the closest parking spot and calls their friends from a rotary phone.

When it comes to medical conditions, the decision to give up takes on another level of importance.

Many illnesses require an intense treatment plan that demands strict adherence. In addition, they involve a partial or complete lifestyle shift that involves ending old patterns of behavior and replacing them with new ones.

The most difficult illnesses are the ones that continue to progress and worsen even when treatment recommendations are following exactly. To some, this is a battle not worth fighting and giving up sounds like the preferred choice.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is one of these conditions. COPD makes its presence known in a multidimensional way.

It will impact the way you feel physically and emotionally. It will change your relationships and your daily life. Pessimism and hopelessness emerge to convince you that giving up is the best option — why follow doctor's orders if you are going to get worse and be uncomfortable along the way?

However, by fighting the condition and following treatment, you gain opportunities. Each opportunity offers promise that today could be better than yesterday. Do you want to resist the temptation of giving up and giving in to COPD?

Grieve and Mourn

It may be strange to see this step listed first, but it is actually very necessary. COPD is a major diagnosis, and conditions this significant require of period of time and effort to process the emotional impact accordingly.

No, you might not be dying in the foreseeable future, but grieving is still an appropriate action to take. If you do not grieve and mourn, you will be left as an overly emotional, irrational and detached shadow of yourself.

To begin the process, consider your life with COPD. How does the diagnosis make you feel? What are your fears and concerns? What about it makes you angry?

Setting aside time from your day to purposefully think about your condition will aid in your ability to move through the stages from denial to acceptance. Do not fear you feelings, embrace them.

Be sure to let others know what you are experiencing and how they can help. Obviously they cannot reverse your COPD, but they can improve your mental health symptoms in an attempt to make life more desirable.

Grieving and mourning are called processes because they take time, so give yourself the patience needed to move towards acceptance. Because of this, any decisions regarding giving up should be left until the process is completed. Otherwise, you might make a choice that you would not agree with later.

Build Hope

After you find a place of acceptance with your COPD diagnosis, you can begin looking at ways to build hope. Hope is an incredibly valuable asset for people thinking about giving up. When there is hope, there is potential for situations to improve.

COPD may change your focus towards all of the activities you can no longer do. It is too easy to say, “I can’t do anything anymore.” If you leave that thought in place, you will feel disappointed and powerless, which makes giving up seem more appealing.

Check in with your thoughts to understand what you are saying to yourself. Remember the way you think has a direct impact on how you feel. If you want to feel better, you have to think better — you control your thoughts.

List-making is a fantastic way to explore these thoughts because seeing them appear in writing makes them seem more tangible and changeable. Write down your thoughts and inspect each one. Does this seem rational or fueled by COPD’s ability to create depression, anxiety, and stress?

If the thought seems inaccurate, rewrite it to be something more realistic and positive. You don’t need to lie to yourself; you only need to see that many different viewpoints exist. Yours might not be the best.

These changed thoughts need to come from you. If you think having loved ones or doctors list your abilities will be enough, you will be let down. In this case, hope can only come from the inside out.

Set New Expectations and Goals

With hope, you will have the desire to push forward against COPD. To find success, you need to let go of your previous perceptions of yourself. You are changed now, so you will not be able to do some of your former activities or spend time with former friends. You can find new activities and new supports, though.

Transitioning to new interests and supports can be a challenging task later in life, but it is always possible. What new interests do you want to try? What is stopping your from doing it?

Do not be afraid of emotional discomfort. New challenges will be uncomfortable but fruitful. As long as you are being realistic and kind to yourself regarding your abilities, you may discover a range of new interests, activities and people that were previously unknown.

Now will not be the best time to take up marathon running, but any number of low-intensity activities including crafting, walking, woodworking, scrapbooking, puzzles, reading and cooking can make a positive change.

When experiencing the desire to give and surrender to the looming force of COPD, you say to the world that you are out of good ideas. With the use of creativity, perseverance, and the steps described above, you can build the hope needed to continue your fight. You are worth fighting for.