Using Technology to Help Manage COPD

by RUSSELL WINWOOD

How Technology Can Help COPD

If you're a chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) patient like me, then chances are you are constantly looking for ways to make your life easier. In this article, I look at how modern technology can play a part in improving a patient's quality of life.

With the vast array of products and services hitting the market we need to zone in on the most effective tools.

Online Tools

For those patients fortunate enough to have access to the Internet, your world becomes extremely accessible. Many products and services are available online and you are able to research them before you purchase.

The online shopping world has changed the way we shop and allowed us to view a wide range of goods. Most retailers have online stores where you can purchase their products and have them delivered to your home.

If you're not sure where to start, then go through your daily/weekly purchases and work out if you can buy them online.

If grocery shopping is a chore you are finding hard to do, then registering for online grocery shopping may be the answer. Depending on your location, some stores offer an order and delivery service, which saves you going out. On the days you can't catch your breath this can be a good option.

Thinking outside the box can open up a whole new world of easy living. Many local pharmacies offer a service where your prescriptions are left with the pharmacy; all you have to do is advise them when they are to be filled.

You can either arrange delivery through the pharmacy or have a friend or family member pick up your order. These services may not be available everywhere but there is no harm in asking.

The fastest growing use of online tools is the ability to connect to the COPD world. Whether you are looking for information about COPD or a support group, your needs are well served.

A word of warning — researching COPD can pop up some confusing information, so be sure to search a number of resources to confirm what you find.

Telemedicine is here and may well be the future. Telemedicine is where information and technology combined with telecommunications provide health care services without a face-to-face appointment. In the future doctors will be monitoring your health from their clinics while you're at home.

The World of Fitness Trackers

There was a time that a mention of fitness trackers in COPDland was met with anxiety. Not so much nowadays, as patients are marching towards a more active lifestyle. But for the uninitiated, what can these devices do?

The simplest device to use is a pulse oximeter. This device measures the oxygen saturation of your blood. This information is an important tool in tracking exacerbations and determining when your activity is more than your lungs can handle.

If you are mobile you may find a pedometer is a useful device. Pedometers are used to measure your steps.

Many patients like to set step goals as a way to improve their fitness. Some pedometers will save your sessions so they can be uploaded onto a computer to monitor your progress.

Activity trackers are becoming the most popular tool for COPD patients as they have multiple features in a compact, easy-to-wear device. Fitness trackers range in features and price, starting from base models that record steps and heart rate, to fully functional multi-sport devices that record an array of data.

Heart rate, distance, time, VO2, stride length and cadence are just some of the features that are out there. Unfortunately, at the time of writing this article there is no device that accurately monitors your oxygen saturation when you are active, but it is certainly something being developed.

If you are thinking of buying an activity tracker, the best advice I can give you is don't impulse buy. Work out what you want from an activity tracker and what your budget is.

If you haven't used one before, then an entry level device is the way to go. I've seen people purchase these devices and rarely use them as they find the technology difficult to understand or just aren't comfortable wearing the device. Talk to your doctor about what you're looking for as they can help you with your decision.

Mobile Phones and Apps

We come to the most popular of the techno world, the mobile phone. There's not much a mobile phone cannot do these days. They can be an invaluable tool or a headache depending on its purpose.

How can they help a COPD patient? The obvious is being able to contact someone in a time of need and the usual uses of a phone. But when you dig a little deeper you realize a mobile phone can be a personal computer in the palm of your hand.

We can access the online world and shop, as many stores now have apps that provide a door to their products and services. There are apps for just about everything, including COPD apps.

Many activity trackers now have apps so you can upload your activities and share them on social media. There are app communities where people can compete with there friends to reach exercise goals. Used correctly, and in good spirit, this can be a great way to motivate yourself and other patients to keep active.

I personally use an activity tracker with an app to monitor my progress and to share my training sessions. My coach can access my app to view my activities and make sure I'm progressing the way he would like.

While not everyone will embrace this technological roller coaster we're on, it is worth investigating. If you see something that will give you a better quality of life, then embrace it. If it seems to daunting then don't be afraid to ask for help.