What Should You Wear If You Have COPD?

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Clothes for COPD: Tips for Dressing Yourself With COPD

When you're diagnosed with COPD, you're given a lot of information and education.

For example, "You should use *this* inhaler in the morning and evening. You should use *this* inhaler when your symptoms flare up. If you need to use them both at the same time, use *this one first.*"

Or, "There are many things that can trigger your COPD to flare up. You'll find that many things on this list will flare your symptoms – and some things won't. You should avoid as many of these as possible, at least until you know what is going to trigger your symptoms."

And most importantly, "Here's a list of signs and symptoms when you need to seek emergency medical attention!"

But has anyone ever told you that the way that you *dress* can ease your COPD symptoms? Yes – your clothing can make all the difference!

Tips for Dressing

First, enlist some help. This may take a while – and you'll want to conserve your energy. Ask a friend or family member for assistance – and ensure that it is a person who will give you an honest opinion.

You're going to want to look over your wardrobe carefully. Look at your undergarments. Is that bra a bit tight? How about that shirt? What about those pants? If anything is very fitted around the torso and the waist, chances are good that it will be uncomfortable when your symptoms are acting up. Toss it out, pass it on to a friend, or donate it.

Once you've decided on what to keep and what to get rid of, it's time to shop! Here are some tips on what to look for (or for what to have a friend or family member look for):

- Look for socks that do not have tight bands. These types of socks can restrict your circulation. This does NOT include pressure support stockings that your physician may have prescribed for you, of course!
- Men may prefer to utilize suspenders to hold up their pants rather than a belt. Suspenders may put less pressure on the waist and may also utilize less energy to put on.
- Tight bras may put too much pressure on the chest. Instead, look for flattering camisoles with pretty details, like lace. If you're well-endowed, a sports bra or a bralette may be more comfortable on your chest than a traditional bra, while still offering your chest support.
- Choose shirts with collars that are not tight. If your symptoms exacerbate, these types of collars can feel strangling. Instead, choose button-up shirts or shirts with scoop necks or v-necks.
- Choosing clothing that is loose-fitting in general may feel more comfortable.

Now that you've selected some clothing, here are some tips on energy conservation when you're getting dressed:

- Bending over to put on your shoes, as well as tie them can be exhausting. Using lace-free, slip-on shoes can solve this dilemma. In addition, purchasing a shoehorn can also be helpful.
- Set out clothing the evening before. Having all the clothing you need in one location makes it easier when getting dressed!
- If you get easily tired while getting dressed, sit down on a chair or your bed. Dressing the bottom half of the body is often the most tiresome, so dress the bottom half first.
- Purchase a long-handled reacher – this can help you reach items such as socks when you're getting ready!

Dressing Considerations in Hot and Cold Weather

We've discussed dressing for COPD in general. All of the above tips still apply, but there are things to consider in temperature extremes.

In hot weather:

- Wear a wide-brimmed hat to help keep the face and neck cool.
- Select clothing that is made of thin fabric.
- Your clothing should also be light colors – light colors do not absorb the sun as well, meaning that you will be more likely to stay cool!

In cold weather:

- You'll want to dress in layers. Ensure that you have undershirts or long underwear. These extra layers ensure that your body stays warm.
- As with anyone else who ventures outside in cold weather, you'll want to wear a hat, a warm jacket, and insulated boots.
- A scarf is important – a scarf can act as a barrier between your mouth and the cold air. This barrier can humidify the air and prevent allow your lungs to function better.

The Bottom Line…

Dressing in a certain way may not make or break your COPD, but it may improve how you feel on a daily basis.