How to Deal With COPD During the Summer

by KRYSTINA OSTERMEYER

Managing COPD in the Summer

According to Healthcare Services Therapy, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) affects over 20 million Americans. That is a lot of people who struggle to breathe on a daily basis!

Every person's struggle with COPD is individual, but a lot of people have a more difficult time with their summer COPD symptoms.

Why?

There are several reasons why COPD symptoms can worsen during the summer months – understanding these reasons can make it easier to manage COPD during the summer.

Temperature Extremes

When temperatures skyrocket, our bodies must work harder to regulate our body temperature – regardless of our disease state. If you have COPD, the simple act of body temperature regulation can cause shortness of breath.

If you have COPD, as soon as you're exposed to warm air, your bronchioles becomes inflamed – causing bronchospasm. This bronchospasm causes the bronchioles to become smaller in diameter, meaning less oxygen is available for respiration.

Allergy Exposure

For people who have both COPD and environmental allergies, summer can be a double whammy.

Environmental allergies can also trigger bronchospasm in the lungs, again causing the bronchioles to constrict. If the temperature is already high, allergy exposure can be detrimental.

Tips for Managing COPD

Knowing that increased temperature and allergy exposure can worsen COPD symptoms, there are several ways to increase the likelihood of an exacerbation-free summer!

First of all – if you take medications, now is not the time to stop taking them, unless told to do so by your doctor. There are a variety of medications used to treat COPD – both daily medications and rescue medications – and they have been prescribed at the discretion of your physician. Use them as indicated. Taking them as prescribed will allow you the best chance of enjoying your summer.

Next, keep your eye on the forecast – watch for the temperature, humidity, and pollen count. On days when the

temperature and humidity is extreme and/or the pollen count is high, take your activities indoors. If you can plan your activities around a location with air conditioning, this may be even better.

When planning outdoor activities, try to get outside in the earlier part of the day or the later part of the day. At these times, the temperature tends to be a bit lower. Not only is the temperature lower, but the risk of sunburn is lower as well.

Regardless of where you take your activities, stay hydrated unless otherwise told to do so by your physician. Dehydration can worsen COPD because it makes it more difficult for you to regulate body temperature, which is essential in the summer months!

Humidity can worsen COPD symptoms. You cannot control the humidity outside, so if it is extremely humid, stay inside. In addition, purchase a dehumidifier for your home. Use this during the summer months. A dehumidifier removes excess water from the air. Purchase a small dehumidifier and use it in the room you spend most of your time, such as your living room or bedroom.

Additionally, if you suffer from environmental allergies, treat your allergies. Treating your allergies can decrease your symptoms when you are exposed to allergens. According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America AAFA), there are a couple of ways to treat allergies:

Medications

Medications are commonly used to treat allergies, especially during acute periods. Decongestants can be used on a short-term basis. Antihistamines can treat symptoms associated with allergies, but can also be given on a daily basis to prevent symptoms from occurring. Nasal corticosteroids reduce swelling in the nasal passages that may occur, which cause the dreaded stuffy nose. There are a variety of other medication options but these are the most commonly used options.

Immunotherapy

Immunotherapy can also be given, via injections or sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT). Immunotherapy is begun after an allergy test is administered, which narrows down what you are allergic to. Then, you are given small amounts of allergens over a period of time, and you become less sensitive to that allergen over time. The downside to immunotherapy – it is not a "quick fix" and can take several years to work.

Work with your physician to create a treatment plan that work for *you* and know that you can enjoy this summer!