5 Lifestyle Changes to Help Improve COPD Symptoms

by RUSSELL WINWOOD

5 COPD Lifestyle Changes

Being proactive is the key to having a better quality of life with COPD. We know for smokers, quitting, is the number one way to improve your symptoms.

There is a glut of information around today on just how you may better manage your condition. Some are good, some not so good. In this article, I'll share five COPD lifestyle changes.

Change Your Surroundings

The best place to start when thinking of changes to improve your symptoms is at home. Let's call it a COPD audit! You can do this on your own, or sometimes an extra pair of caring eyes are useful.

Look at the what around your home could be changed to make life easier for you. This could be as simple as moving an item you use every day into a better position for ease of access. Reaching up for items can be taxing so keep those high use items down at waist level.

Access in and out of your home is important, especially if you require a mobility scooter or walker. Keeping passageways clear to avoid falling or stress when moving about your house can be challenging if space limits you.

Asking a friend or family member to help you declutter and organize your space will reap the rewards. Less clutter around the home also means less dust.

Speaking of dust, is housework an issue for you? Remember a clean house is a house your lungs will appreciate. Dust is a trigger for many patients and can exacerbate their symptoms very quickly.

If keeping up with the housework is difficult due to your health, then enlist some help. Family, friends and local support groups are great places to start.

If you live in a remote area or don't have access to help, a cleaning schedule can be useful. Make a list of areas to be cleaned and complete one area at a time; this will help conserve energy.

If you can stick to this schedule over time, you will reduce the amount of cleaning you need to do. Regular cleaning means less cleaning, something I've learned over many years in the cleaning industry. Remember, wear a mask and try to use cleaning products which will not aggravate your symptoms.

These are just a few tips to get you started, make a list and tick off your tasks one by one.

What's Happening In the Outside World?

My morning routine starts with what's happening outside? Our outside environment can dictate our daily activities. Weather, traffic pollution, and smoke are my main triggers which exacerbate my COPD.

We can't control any of these phenomena's, but we can try to manage our exposure to them. Planning our day around the outside environment isn't always easy, but to improve our symptoms is necessary.

If I know the weather forecast is for hot and humid conditions, I will limit my outside activities to the cooler part of the day, morning or evening. Humidity affects many COPD patients, and we often find ourselves looking for places with air conditioning.

Many local authorities give warnings about controlled burn offs or bushfire alerts, keeping up to date with this information can help you avoid coming into contact with smoke which will more than likely cause a flare-up of your disease.

Winter time can be problematic in some areas due to wood fires which are used for heating. Avoiding the outdoors early in the morning is one way to limit your exposure to this pollutant.

Depending on the country you live in, cigarette smoke can be an issue either walking around or dining out. Smoking laws vary from country to country. My home country has strict smoking laws which make avoiding exposure much easier.

However, in other countries I have visited the laws seem to favor the smoker rather than the non-smoker. Try to stay in areas where you are less likely to come into contact with cigarette smoke. Avoid bars and clubs where smoking is prevalent and look for dining areas with designated smoking areas.

Don't Forget to Take Your Medication

After your COPD diagnosis, your doctor will prescribe a range of medicines to help you manage your disease. It is vital you stick to your doctor's instructions in both the timing you take your medication and the technique you use if you have inhaled medication.

I regularly hear patients say they forgot to take their medication and have found their symptoms worsen. I take my medications before I brush my teeth, morning and night. Doing it this way becomes a habit and you are less likely to forget.

Another common complaint early in a patient's diagnosis is their medication works some days and not others. While the feeling of breathlessness can be attributed to many causes, many times the problem can be poor inhaler technique. If this sounds familiar, then talk to your doctor or pharmacist about correcting your method.

Yearly flu vaccinations are essential for COPD patients to help fight off infections. Check with your doctor to make sure your flu and pneumonia vaccinations are up to date. Remember, avoid contact with people who have a cold or flu symptoms, as their symptoms can become your next exacerbation.

Nutrition and Exercise Is Important

For those of you who have read my previous articles, you would know diet and exercise play a significant role in managing my disease.

The importance of these two topics cannot be understated. We now have scientific evidence which supports the benefits of nutritional and exercise strategies to improve the quality of life for COPD patients.

Nutrition is a topic best discussed with a qualified dietitian or nutritionist. Their expertise will enable them to design an eating plan which will best benefit your disease.

Portion size, macronutrients, food quality and timing of meals all play a part in good nutritional strategies. Either talk to your doctor or look up your local Dietetics Association for registered dietitians in your area.

Of course, once you have a good nutrition plan exercise becomes even more beneficial. Many patients skip nutrition as they don't understand its importance. Fact is you can't exercise your way out of a poor diet.

Fuelling your exercise activity will result in improved exercise performance, this, in turn, will improve your symptoms.

Try Pulmonary Rehabilitation

If you haven't undertaken pulmonary rehabilitation then now's the time to do so.

Pulmonary rehabilitation will teach you how to exercise safely as well as educate you on how to manage your overall disease in the best was possible. Once you have completed pulmonary rehabilitation, you will be well armed with the knowledge on how you can improve your quality of life.

In Conclusion...

Hopefully, some of my COPD lifestyle changes will help you improve your COPD symptoms. It's important to remember to continue to learn about your disease, the more knowledgeable you become, the better you will manage your condition.