Tips for Coping With COPD and Allergies

by RUSSELL WINWOOD

COPD and Allergies

If you are one of the millions of patients around the world who has been diagnosed with COPD, then you know what it's like to be breathless. But if you are a COPD patient who suffers from allergies, you have to be on the ball in avoiding these allergic triggers as allergic reactions can be life-threatening.

A recent study outlined how severe respiratory symptoms, as well as acute exacerbations, can be common amongst allergic COPD patients. Being a COPD patient who suffers from allergic reactions, in this article I'll share some of my tips on coping with COPD and allergies.

Identify What Your Allergy Triggers Are

As patients, we often ignore the obvious with managing our disease. We focus on taking our medications, keeping as active as possible but at times forget the impact an allergic reaction can have on our disease. One of the most important tasks we can undertake as COPD patients is identifying if we have allergies and if we do, what are our triggers.

But first we need to understand what an allergy is. Put simply an allergy is when a person's immune system reacts to a substance which most people do not react to. These substances are known as allergens and can be found in dust mites, pets, pollen, insects, ticks, molds, foods and certain medicines.

Make an Appoint With an Allergy Specialist

Living with allergies can be complex but there are ways we can make the process easier to manage. If you suspect you have allergies, then a good first step is to make an appointment to see an Immunologist. An experienced Immunologist can carry out an allergy test which will determine what your allergies are.

Once you know what is causing your reactions you can start a process of eliminating or managing the allergens. For example, if your allergy is from your pet than you can make sure your pet and its bedding is regularly washed for cleanliness and hygiene. If you are allergic to a certain plant or flower in your garden than it can be removed or moved to a different location.

Avoiding Food Allergies With COPD

Many people stumble across their allergies by accident and sometimes it can take several encounters before you identify the allergen causing you issues. A good example of this was one of my own experiences.

I was out having dinner one night with my wife. I had ordered a Thai meal on the menu. While eating this meal I started to become red in the face. Soon after I became very breathless, much more than just my normal COPD symptoms.

We weren’t sure what caused this reaction, but I decided from then on, I would avoid Thai food. A few months later the same thing happened when my wife and were out having dinner again, this time it was not Thai food. When we looked back and compare the ingredients of both meals there was one common denominator, coriander!

Since then I have mostly avoided coriander, except on one occasion where it was placed in a meal by accident. The same reaction occurred again. At times I do eat Thai food when we go out, but ensure I order meals with no coriander.

This could be considered as a food allergy; does it sound familiar? Are there certain foods you eat which have caused similar reactions? Part of coping with allergies is knowing what they are and identifying them can sometimes be difficult.

If you may have a food allergy, again it’s a matter of identifying the allergen and eliminating it from your diet. Sometimes you can keep eating that same meal you enjoy, you may just have to substitute the ingredients.

Also, dairy is a common allergen for some COPD patients but nowadays there are many tasty diary options which do not cause an allergic reaction.

Tips for Coping With a Pet Allergy and COPD

I know many people have lived with their allergy triggers for many years without ever realizing it. The family pet can be a perfect example. Being allergic to cat or dog can be common amongst COPD patients. But if you have always lived with pets you may not realize the allergic symptoms you are experiencing may well be caused by your favorite companion.

This doesn’t mean you have to send your cherished pet on its way, but it may mean taking some precautions to limit the effects your pet may have on you. Sometimes a pet allergy can actually have nothing to do with the pet. If your pet roams around outside it may well have picked up a substance on its coat which is what is causing your reaction.

Over-the-Counter Medication May Help

Patients with mild allergies can quite often get relief from taking some simple steps which can include regular cleaning as well as medications such as antihistamines.

Some patient’s allergies are seasonal and are due to pollens in the air. Limiting exposure and even wearing a filtered mask can be used to successfully navigate your way through a change of season.

The Takeaway

Coping with COPD and allergies can be tricky but following a system which identifies, eliminates or manages your particular allergies is possible. Keeping a diary of what you eat and the environment you’re in when you have an allergic reaction can be crucial in setting up a successful management plan.

If allergies are making your COPD symptoms worse, then its time to talk to your doctor about putting a plan in place to lessen the burden.