How to Create a COPD Care Plan

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COPD Care Plan

Whether you are a newly diagnosed COPD patient or a long-term patient, it is important to manage your disease. Patients who are committed to improving their quality of life will have a COPD care plan. In this article, I share my care plan and how it has improved my quality of life.

Currently, there is no cure for COPD, and it is regarded as a progressive disease which can have an increasingly negative effect on a patient's quality of life. Our health care professionals can advise on how to manage our condition, but it is a patient's responsibility to implement those recommendations.

An important part of implementing this advice is creating by a COPD care plan which incorporates strategies to improve your quality of life. This is best done in conjunction with your doctor, so they are aware of your COPD care plan and can be part of updating it – when needed.

Keep in mind that a plan shouldn't be a fixed strategy and instead should be a plan which can be added to as you and your doctor identify different strategies which work for you.

What to Keep in Mind When Creating Your COPD Care Plan

The World Health Organisation (WHO) state an effective COPD management plan includes four components:

- Assess and monitor disease
- Reduce risk factors
- Assist in managing stable COPD
- Manage exacerbations

These recommendations can be used as a basis for your care plan. I have used them as the basis of how I manage my disease for many years with great success.

Assess and Monitor the Disease

When you are first diagnosed with COPD, your doctor will know the severity of your disease. This serves as an important baseline which you can refer to when monitoring the progression of your disease. Monitoring disease progression can be done during your regular doctor's visits and at home.

There are a growing number of devices available which enable patients to measure lung function at home. This can be useful information for your doctor as you can monitor more regularly, giving a better picture of how COPD affects you.

Reduce Risk Factors

Smoking cessation is the number one thing you can do to reduce the progression and exacerbation of COPD. If this is something you are having problems with then it’s important you ask for help.

In previous articles, I have talked about the many different types of triggers for COPD. Identifying what triggers your COPD is very important in successfully managing your disease. It could be smoke from any source, particular fragrances, pollens in the air, or other environmental factors. While there are many common triggers, you may have ones which are personal to you.

As you identify your triggers, you can implement strategies which help you minimize or avoid contact with these triggers. From my own experience, this has made an enormous difference to my day-to-day life and how well I can breathe.

Manage Stable COPD

Having your COPD stable is important as you try to improve your overall quality of life with COPD. Your doctor will advise you on the types of medication which are best for your disease. Once your disease is stable, you can start to introduce strategies which can help improve your quality of life.

Pulmonary rehabilitation has shown to improve patient’s day to day lives, and it certainly has had a positive impact on mine. Your doctor can help you find a pulmonary rehabilitation program in your area. Most pulmonary rehabilitation programs run for a designated time, generally 6-10 weeks depending on where you live. Once you have finished the program, it is essential you continue to make exercise a regular part of your lifestyle. For patients who don’t do this, they will lose the benefits received from completing the program.

Another important aspect of keeping your COPD stable is by watching and being aware of what you eat. The amount of food and types of food consumed can have a significant impact on the way we breathe. Working with an experienced dietician who can provide you with a list about what kinds of foods COPD patients should eat is important as well to your COPD care plan. For me, I found eliminating foods such as pasta, bread, rice and sugar all made a positive impact on my breathing.

Manage Exacerbations

Exacerbations are part of life with COPD and, as patients, it is vital we do everything we can to limit the severity of exacerbations. How we do this is an important conversation we have to have with our doctor.

Once we have a COPD exacerbation, it is important to contact your doctor, so they are aware of what is going on. Your doctor may ask you to make an appointment immediately so they can determine the best course of action.

Some doctors are confident in their patient’s ability to manage their exacerbation in the early stages. This may mean that the patient has prescriptions at home for antibiotics, steroids or other medications. Some exacerbations can be cut short when treated early with medication. For patients living in remote areas and cannot easily attend doctors’ appointments, having prescriptions on hand can be crucial in managing exacerbations.

Discussing with your doctor the point where you need to attend hospital is important. Sometimes you will have exacerbations which progress very quickly and are severe. When you are faced with this calling an ambulance for immediate assistance will be the best course of action.

The Takeaway

It's important to keep in mind that every COPD care plan will be different. What I have outlined can form the basis of your own care plan. Before you visit your doctor to discuss your care plan, it's a good idea to write down what you consider important in your care plan. If you haven't put your care plan together yet, then it's time to hop to it!