Four Ways to Manage COPD-Related Shortness of Breath

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COPD and Shortness of Breath

One of the hardest symptoms of COPD to deal with is the constant shortness of breath. The inability to deal with this can lead to other problems such as exhaustion, or feeling run down, which can put you at risk of contracting an infection.

In this article, I will discuss my COPD and how I deal with shortness of breath.

My Experience With COPD Shortness of Breath

For me, breathless can start from as soon as I wake in the mornings until I fall asleep at night, and that's on a good day. Throw an exacerbation into the equation, and I'm breathless 24/7. For those of you who are living with COPD, you'll know what I'm talking about exactly.

The simple act of just getting upright in the morning can induce a bout of breathlessness. Then comes the morning shower, drying myself, changing into clothes, I'm sure you would know the drill! This morning ritual can certainly take it out of me when I'm having a bad day.

By the time I've managed to compose myself and go downstairs to the kitchen, the last thing I could be bothered doing is preparing breakfast. So, I either don't eat or eat something easily prepared and generally of poor nutritional value. Does this sound familiar?

Now I have to face a day of work, and as you can imagine, I haven't started on the best footing. I go off to work, and as the morning goes on, I become more and more breathless. After a couple of hours, I have had enough and need to go home and sleep; the shortness of breath has caused me to feel exhausted.

I sleep the day away, and before long it's dinner time. I have dinner and overeat as I'm hungry because I couldn't be bothered eating earlier. Because I overate, I'm now even more short of breath and have to go off to bed. I fall asleep, wake up in the morning, and repeat.

This was my COPD when diagnosed eight years ago. It certainly isn't my COPD today! Yes, I still have my bad days, but my bad days now are like my good days back then. I'm still breathless every day, but I have learned over the years how to improve and manage my shortness of breath.

How I Improved My Shortness of Breath

How did I do it, you ask? It has been a process but a process worth employing if you want to regain your life.

Medication

It all starts with medication and knowledge of what they are for and how we use them. If you're unsure about any aspect of your medication, then act now. Talk to your doctor or healthcare professional and make sure you are getting the full benefit from your medication.

Getting this first step right is key to improving your shortness of breath.

Exercise and Nutrition

When looking at improving your breathing, it's important to think about strategies which are proven to help. Exercise and nutrition have played a key role in improving my quality of life.

This is where a pulmonary rehabilitation program can be of great benefit. Pulmonary rehabilitation incorporates exercise and education appropriate for your COPD. Along with exercising, you will learn breathing techniques; these will help you manage your shortness of breath.

Healthcare professionals who run these programs are highly trained to assess your ability to exercise and will start you off on a level you feel comfortable with. When I was first contemplating exercise in the early days, it was quite daunting. I couldn't get my head around why I would want to make myself more breathless.

The reality for me was the more I exercised, the better I felt when I wasn't exercising. By pushing yourself in a safe environment, your fitness levels improve. As your fitness improves, so does your ability to control your breathing. You'll also find you gradually become less breathless. Your doctor can help you find a pulmonary rehabilitation program in your area.

Nutrition has played a significant role in improving my shortness of breath. Unfortunately, it is an underutilized tool mainly because most doctors aren't trained in nutrition, which is why we have dieticians! Finding a dietician experienced in treating respiratory patients is important.

For me, eliminating processed foods, especially carbohydrates, had a considerable impact. While this has worked for other patients and me, it may not be suitable for everyone. This is why seeking out a dietician to find what works for you is important.

Avoiding Your Triggers

Working out the triggers which worsen your shortness of breath is important.

For me, smoke, pollution, some perfumes, pollens, and a sudden change in temperature all have a negative impact on my breathing. Being aware of my surroundings and the potential to come in contact with these triggers is something I have learned to be very good at.

Listening to your body is so important and can be easier said than done. Take note of the times and places which affect your breathing. Also, take notice of when you are at your best. Sometimes we ignore the obvious, and these can be simple solutions to what we thought was a difficult problem.

Rest

Getting good quality sleep is one of the best things we can do for our bodies. When we sleep, we repair, recover, and refresh our bodies. Sleep can be the difference between a good day and a bad day. Lack of sleep for me invariably means increased shortness of breath.

In Conclusion

These are the most important strategies I have used to improve my shortness of breath and quality of life. At the end of the day, it's about what works for you. Hopefully, my tips can help you too.