How to Manage Bloating When You Have COPD

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COPD and Bloating

Most people have experienced bloating at some stage of their lives. It can be uncomfortable but not terribly debilitating, unless you are a COPD patient. The combination of COPD and bloating is very debilitating especially if you are already having an exacerbation. In this article I will cover what bloating is, how it affects COPD patients and my own personal experience overcoming it.

What Is Bloating?

Bloating is commonly caused by excess gas production. Your belly feels swollen or tight and you feel lethargic. Cramps, burping, diarrhea and constipation can all be signs of bloating. Bloating occurs when your digestive system becomes stretched from excess liquid, gas or solids; these pool in part of your stomach.

Sometimes bloating can happen when the contents of your stomach move slowly through your digestive system or if you have weak muscles in your stomach wall or diaphragm. Whatever the cause of your bloating, one of the outcomes may be an increase in breathlessness.

The Connection Between COPD and Bloating

It’s not uncommon for healthy people to become a little short of breath when they are bloated. However, when a COPD patient becomes bloated, they will notice a significant increase in their shortness of breath. If you’re like me, bloating can be very restrictive to moving around. The increased pressure on your lungs and diaphragm can be unbearable and result in a panic attack.

Bloating in COPD patients can be accentuated by inactivity. When you are breathless it can be a struggle to exercise, which in turn results in a loss of strength and fitness. At this stage, your body feels the effects of bloating even more.

Hyperinflated lungs become enlarged over time. This means they take up more room inside your body. COPD patients with hyperinflated lungs are very prone to bloating; I am one of those patients. In the past, when I have eaten too much or had gassy drinks, I find bloating comes on very quick and is quite severe.

What to Do When You Feel Bloated

How you deal with bloating really depends on what has caused you to become bloated. Some patients go straight for their inhaler to relieve their shortness of breath caused by bloating. In my opinion, this is a rookie error which I have made in the past. You keep pumping your lungs full of inhaled medication and you’re still breathless; before you know it, you have the shakes because you’ve taken too much medication.

I find the best thing to do when you’re bloated is to use breathing techniques such as pursed lip breathing. This

will not only reduce your breathlessness, but it will also relax you. The other thing I find useful is to go to the toilet. Relieving yourself can often put a stop to bloating quickly. If your bloating is caused by excessive food or drink intake, chances are several toilet visits will help.

If bloating is a common occurrence for you then you should talk to your doctor about what other options may be suitable. There are a number of medications which may be useful.

How to Prevent Bloating

Because my lungs are often hyper-inflated, I had my fair share of bouts with bloating in the past. Over time I have figured out what my triggers for bloating are and how to avoid them. One of my weaknesses in the past was drinking beer. It only takes one to two beers and I am bloated and start to feel breathless. If I had a glass of beer and dinner, then my bloating became significantly worse.

The cure was simple, no more beer. Many of us like to have an alcoholic drink during social occasions and I'm no different; so, I had to find a substitute. For me, red wine is the substitute. Why red wine? Red wine unlike white wine doesn't make me feel bloated or breathless at all. Learn more about how alcohol can affect COPD.

Diet is another area in which I've made some changes. In the past, I have found foods such as pasta, rice and bread rolls would make me bloated and trigger an increase in breathlessness. For those of you who have followed my journey, you will know I have been using a ketogenic diet for three years. While using the ketogenic diet I haven't had any episodes of bloating. I think one of the main reasons is, because of the high volume of fats consumed on this diet, you tend not to overeat. I believe the types of foods you eat using a ketogenic diet don't trigger bloating. This is of course my experience only.

If bloating is something you deal with on a regular basis, speak to your doctor about what's going on. If between the two of you, you can identify the cause of your bloating, it's likely you will be able to manage it. A good starting point is keeping a diary of bloating episodes so you can try to pinpoint what has triggered it.

COPD can be a difficult disease to manage at times. Add to this a bout of bloating and life can get very tiresome. However, with the right strategies you can manage bloating and have one less trigger to deal with.