How Natural Remedies May Help COPD Symptoms

by ANGELA FINLAY

Natural Treatments for COPD to Consider

Since chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a progressive disease, the main aim of treatment is to slow down the progression of the condition in order to preserve your breathing. In most cases, this means taking targeted medication to quiet the symptoms and making some important lifestyle changes to build a stronger body.

Pulmonary rehabilitation is the main physical therapy to manage COPD — your doctor should have plenty of information about it and should be willing to refer you to a pulmonary therapist if you're not already seeing one.

However, these main COPD treatments aren't your only options. In some cases, it pays off to try a different complementary therapy. Below we have some natural treatments for COPD you should consider trying.

The Best Complement to Medication

Next to quitting smoking and appropriate medication, regular exercise is the most important element in any COPD management plan. It can seem counterintuitive at first — stressing your lungs when they're already stressed — but moving your muscles and revving up your heart rate can strengthen every system in your body, including your respiratory system.

Of course, exercise comes in lots of different forms, and some of them won't be appropriate for your body. There's no place for heavy weightlifting or marathon training in your regimen, but don't let that stop you.

There are three types of activity that, when used within the right parameters, can really help you breathe better:

- **Cardiovascular exercise:** Working out the large muscle groups at a challenging pace will strengthen your heart and lungs and teach your body to use oxygen more efficiently. As you gain aerobic fitness, your heart won't have to work as hard, which will help you breathe easier.
- **Upper-body resistance:** Gentle resistance training for the chest, arms and back can help build strength in the muscles around the ribcage and around the respiratory system. The stronger your torso, the better your posture and the easier it will be to keep your airways open.
- **Deep stretching:** Yoga and Pilates practices will fuse stretching with breathing in such a way as to improve breath control and lengthen the muscles for better function.

Many people find it doesn't take long to get into the swing of things, and you might begin to enjoy improvement within a week or two. However, you'll need to be very careful about changing your routine or upping your exertion level too quickly.

It's best to work with your doctor to first determine safe limits, then draft an exercise plan to safely improve your fitness at a gradual pace.

Supplements for COPD

Dietary supplements and herbal remedies have been used for centuries for respiratory problems, and modern scientists confirm that some may hold promise for COPD patients. Below are just a few examples of dietary supplements for COPD that may help:

Ginseng

Studies on the benefits of ginseng in COPD treatment have been poorly organized and generally inadequate for firm conclusions — most have lasted three months or less. However, ginseng has been hailed for its health benefits, and there is a possibility the herb could help improve lung function.

The downside is ginseng is known to interfere with several types of medication, so it's certainly not a good choice for everyone.

Vitamin D

The sunshine vitamin might offer a boost to lung function, but it's not entirely clear why. Since COPD is typically diagnosed in older people, and vitamin D levels decline with age, it may be a matter of bringing vitamin D levels to back up to normal in order to improve general health (including lung function).

However, a 2012 study showed no reduction in flare-ups among patients taking vitamin D supplements, so it might not be as powerful as it seems.

L-Carnitine

This is a naturally-occurring compound the body uses to burn fat for energy. It appears to have a second function in COPD patients: those who take L-carnitine supplements notice better endurance and easier aerobic activity. In turn, it can be a very helpful tool as you work to improve your fitness.

N-Acetylcysteine (NAC)

This is a potent antioxidant that has been shown to dramatically reduce cough and thin out the mucus that builds up in the airways. Although the studies haven't proven NAC can slow lung deterioration or prevent flare-ups, its ability to loosen phlegm and help clear out the airways earns it a spot among the most helpful supplements for COPD symptoms.

Other antioxidant supplements (particularly vitamins A, C and E) could also offer some protection and improvement in lung function, considering many people with COPD have low levels of these very important compounds.

However, supplements aren't your only option: colorful fruits and vegetables are high in antioxidants, so they could noticeably improve your lung function, too.

Choosing Safe Natural Treatments for COPD

Making small changes to different parts of your routine can bring more benefit than a single approach. For instance, scheduling a weekly massage in addition to a pulmonary rehab appointment will relax your mind and muscles as you strengthen your muscles and airways.

Likewise, adding a helpful supplement (with your doctor's permission) to a wholesome diet could give your body the kick-start it needs.

On the other hand, positive results take time and effort. Be wary of anything claiming to be a quick fix. There is no easy cure for a disease that involves deep damage to the tissue, and any drastic measures can bring a lot more

problems than solutions. Never replace a doctor-prescribed COPD medication with a natural remedy.