Preparing for Your COPD Appointment

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Optimizing Your COPD Appointment With Your Family Doctor and/or Pulmonologist

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a group of diseases of the lungs, blocks airflow and makes it difficult to breathe. Common signs and symptoms of COPD include the following:

- Shortness of breath, particularly while participating in physical activities
- Wheezing
- Tightness of the chest
- Needing to clear the throat early in the morning as the result of excessive mucus accumulated in the lungs while sleeping
- Chronic cough which produces clear, white, greenish or yellowish sputum
- Cyanosis (i.e. blueness) of the lips and/or fingernail beds
- Frequent occurrence of respiratory infections
- Loss of energy or tiredness
- Unintended loss of weight (in the latter stages)

Making Preparations

If you are struggling with the signs and symptoms of COPD, the first step to feeling better is to talk to your family doctor. They will likely refer you to a pulmonologist, which is a doctor specializing in treating diseases or disorders of the lungs.

The specialist will walk you through the various treatment options that are available to assist you in regaining your normal, active lifestyle. In order to optimize your COPD appointments, it is always a good idea to go prepared. A few good tips to help you include:

1. Bring Along a Friend or Relative

A good support system can make managing your chronic breathing problems much easier. Having someone you trust, like a close friend or family member, by your side can provide you with extra confidence as well as emotional support as you become more educated about your chronic condition.

2. Make Careful Notes About Your Latest Symptoms

Take note of your latest symptoms so you and your doctor can discuss an effective treatment plan designed especially for you. It can also be helpful to make note of the ways your COPD symptoms have adversely affected your lifestyle:

- Have you been feeling weak or more tired lately?
- Are you having trouble sleeping?

- Do you have a persistent cough?
- Is it getting worse?
- Have you had your cough for a long time?
- Do you become short of breath easily?
- Do you wheeze when you breathe?

3. Do Your Family Research

Make sure you are aware of your personal medical history, family history and COPD risk factors.

- Does anyone in your family have COPD?
- Do you have a history of lung infections during your childhood?
- Do you have, or did you ever have, excessive exposure to chemicals and/or dust?
- Are you a smoker now or have you ever smoked in the past?

4. Write Down Any Questions You Have

Talking to a family doctor or specialist can sometimes be very intimidating, and it’s quite easy for your mind to go blank when you have dozens of questions to ask. It might be helpful to jot down any questions as you think of them in the days or weeks leading up to your appointment.

The more information you learn about your COPD and how to treat it, the more prepared you will be to manage your condition successfully going forward.

5. Take Notes During the Appointment

It is a wise idea to have a record of the answers to your many questions. Bring along a small notebook and pen so you, or your support person, can jot down notes as you go through various details with your doctor.

Taking notes at the time means you do not have to worry about remembering everything. When you get home from your appointment, you can get out your notes whenever you need to in order to refresh your memory.