The Link Between COPD and Heart Failure

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COPD and Heart Failure: How Does COPD Affect the Cardiovascular System?

Your heart and lungs work as a team, so simply having a diagnosis of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) makes your heart work harder.

When you have COPD, your airways narrow and your lungs become less flexible, which causes increased pressure in your lungs, blood vessels in your chest and heart. As a result, your heart has to work harder than usual.

This may cause fluid to build up in your heart and lungs, which often results in pulmonary hypertension and congestive heart failure (CHF).

What Is Congestive Heart Failure?

Differentiating between a COPD exacerbation and cardiovascular problems is important for proper treatment and relief of symptoms. The signs and symptoms may be similar, so consult with your healthcare provider for an accurate diagnosis.

It's crucial you understand and recognize the signs of this potentially life-threatening condition. Get immediate help from your health care provider or seek emergency assistance if you experience the following CHF signs and symptoms:

- Edema (swelling and fluid accumulation) may occur in your hands or feet, but fluid may also be accumulating internally within your lungs, heart and other tissues.
- Changes in urination.
- Changes in sweating.
- Your extremities, particularly your toes and fingertips, may be cold.
- Your skin may get grey or bluish, or you may become pale or pink.
- Elevated pulse.
- It is very likely you will feel tired because your entire body is working so hard to stabilize itself.
- Your breathing may become labored.

If you have difficulty breathing, seek emergency medical treatment immediately. If you wait, you may become confused or weak and may be unable to obtain help.

Manage Your Blood Pressure

Management of hypertension, also known as high blood pressure, is one of the most important ways to ensure you will be healthy and live well despite COPD.

The increased resistance, decreased flexibility, and diminished space within your air passages may cause your blood pressure to rise, which increases pressure throughout your body. This can harm your lungs and heart, but it can also damage the critical vessels that supply blood to your vital organs.

Elevated blood pressure also puts you at risk for having potentially life-destroying or fatal stroke, so ensure you properly manage your blood pressure.

Eat Well

A healthy diet provides your body with the nutrients it needs to keep your lungs, heart, and the rest of your body well. It can help you control your blood pressure, reduce the likelihood of fluid retention, and help minimize excess secretions.

Here are some tips for healthy eating:

- **Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables.** Compounds in fruits and vegetables aid longevity, fight infections, relieve inflammation, lower cholesterol, and help keep your blood vessels flexible and prevent hypertension.
- **Consume the correct number of calories each day.** Ask your health care provider to recommend how many calories you need. Eating too many calories leads to excess weight, which is a risk factor for cardiovascular and other illnesses, and eating too little does not give you the nutrients you need.
- **Include small amounts of healthy fats in your diet.** Cold, deep water fish like herring, sardines, mackerel, and salmon are rich sources of omega-rich fatty acids. Flax, hemp, and small portions of tree nuts are healthy too.
- **Avoid unhealthy fats.** This includes saturated and polyunsaturated fats.
- **Don’t eat junk food.** Avoid eating packaged, processed, high-sodium and high-sugar foods.
- **If you smoke, quit.** It’s never too late to stop this deadly habit.

Avoid Stress

Stress avoidance and management are necessary for survival. Every life is fraught with stressors, but ensure you take steps to minimize them.

The first step is to identify what causes you stress and then determine whether or not you have any control over them. Chances are you have more control over your situation than you think you have.

You may need to make some tough choices; it may mean challenging beliefs or changing how you look at illness. Search your soul — you know what nourishes you and what robs you of your health already.

Summon up the courage to do whatever it takes to ensure you can live well. While it may not immediately seem like you are being generous to your loved ones, know the greatest gift you can give yourself, and others are to take care of yourself.