Maintaining Independence With COPD

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5 Ways to Maintain Your Independence With COPD

Having low energy levels during the day and sleepless nights due to breathing difficulties can take its toll. If you are not careful, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) may limit your independence.

Your COPD may get worse with time and even lead to lung damage. But if you take a proactive role in managing your COPD and overall health, you can continue to maintain control over your life.

Here are 5 ways to work towards maintaining your independence with COPD

Stay Active

You may find that dealing with limited mobility and getting tired too quickly and easily are the two of the toughest parts of living with COPD. You may also think you cannot exercise or be active, but that is not true.

Staying active is one of the most important parts of managing COPD. And doing the things you love helps you enjoy life so much more.

Even a small amount of exercise helps your heart and lungs stay in shape. If you are getting enough physical exercise, your body won't need extra oxygen when you are participating in treasured hobbies and activities or just spending time when the people you love.

You will, of course, need to make adjustments to stay active. Take your oxygen tank with you everywhere you go and wear a mask when you are outdoors and pollen levels are high.

Make Healthy Food Choices

A healthy diet is important for managing COPD. Eating the right foods will help you to increase energy and give your body the nutrients it needs to feel better and fight off disease.

Talk to your doctor about the best diet plan for you. Your doctor may recommend you see a dietitian who can work with you develop a meal plan for your unique situation.

In general, you should monitor your calorie intake. The American Lung Association recommends keeping an ideal weight to best manage your COPD symptoms.

The best diet for people with COPD is a balance of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and lean meats, according to the *International Journal of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease*. This way you can get key vitamins and nutrients linked to better COPD outcomes.

Additional diet considerations include watching portion sizes, limiting salt intake to avoid fluid retention (which worsens symptoms), and using your supplemental oxygen during and after meals to avoid shortness of breath while eating.

Prevent Infection

You want to work towards protecting yourself from upper respiratory infections.

Make sure you are getting the right vaccines to keep you from getting seriously sick, including a yearly flu shot. According to a review published in *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, people who get a flu shot may find reduced exacerbations in COPD symptoms.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend people with COPD and other chronic lung conditions also get a pneumococcal vaccine too, especially if they are over 65 years of age.

The last thing you can do to help yourself is to consistently wash your hands before and after eating to reduce your risk of getting a cold or the flu.

Keep Social

Your ability to take care of yourself is often dependent on the people around you. You need people in your life to provide emotional support and help you to stay positive.

Social support affects health outcomes, including mental and physical health, health habits, and even risk for mortality, according to researchers from the University of Texas in Austin, Texas.

If you have trouble speaking due to breathlessness, don’t make it a reason to avoid loved ones and friends. Instead, speak slowly and softly, take breaks and try to enjoy being with those who care about you.

You are going to need all the support you can get. There are plenty of support groups out there, and while online support groups are a great resource for information and support, a local support will give you a reason to leave your home.

It may also help to have a neutral and kind voice in your corner as well. A mental health professional can help you work through any number of issues related to your health and offer you an opportunity to vent about the things affecting you currently.

Stay Safe

COPD complicates your ability to heal so if you fall or have an accident, you could easily lose your independence.

You can help yourself by:

- Living on a first floor
- Wearing safe shoes
- Keeping clutter out of your home
- Putting away cords and wires
- Installing grab bars and handrails throughout your home
- Taking oxygen into the shower with you and having a shower chair
- Not smoking
- Wearing oxygen during activities
- Avoiding open flames (e.g., cooking) with your oxygen tank nearby

Cut Yourself Some Slack

COPD is a disease that affects your life, but it doesn’t control your life. Try to keep looking for ways to enjoy life and don’t dwell on the things you have no control over.

And yes, waking up every day with pain, fatigue, and breathing difficulties is tough, but you still have an opportunity to make the best of every situation. When life gets overwhelming, try to break your day into smaller, more manageable parts.

Be grateful for all the things you are still able to do and make sure you continue to work every day towards maintaining your health and independence.