3 Tips for Talking to Your Doctor About COPD

by ANGELA FINLAY

Talking to Your Doctor About COPD

Self-care is such a big part of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) management, and it can be a very empowering opportunity. After all, monitoring and caring for your symptoms at home grants you a lot of control and independence. On the other hand, without accurate, up-to-date information, your COPD could spin out of control despite your best efforts. This is why talking to your doctor about COPD is important.

There's no replacement for a good relationship with your doctor when you live with a chronic illness, and every good relationship is built upon communication. Your doctor is your guide, but they are also your partner in health and healing, so learn how to speak freely about your disease, and forge a more useful relationship with your medical team. This will allow you to have a better understanding of your condition and make informed choices.

Why Good Communication is Important When Talking to Your Doctor About COPD

You might see your relationship with your doctor as a one-way street, but it can (and should) be much more than that. When it comes to diagnosing and managing your condition, there are lots of important details that can get lost along the way if you do not keep the lines of communication open.

It's Important to Know the Stage of Your Illness

COPD can progress at different rates, but it will always progress. A huge number of COPD patients are not aware of the stage of their disease at their time of diagnosis, and many more do not know where they are right now.

Since different treatments and techniques can be used for different stages of COPD, you should know just where you stand at any given time.

Personal Experience Can Say More Than Tests

X-rays, blood tests and breathing tests are all helpful tools, but they don't always paint a complete picture. In many cases, a patient's daily challenges and achievements are a better measure of their state of health.

Small talk is a surprisingly helpful technique. Relating how easily you got through your morning routine, what has been triggering your cough lately, or how difficult it is to navigate a flight of stairs can tell your doctor a good deal of information.

Medication is a Team Effort

Filling your prescription is just the first step. You need to stay in contact with your doctor to make sure you are using your medication properly and adjust the dosage only when necessary.

Researchers have found that COPD patients who rely mostly on self-care instead of regular interaction with their doctor are far more likely to abuse their medication. Sometimes this happens without even realizing it.

For instance, you might feel as though your medication is not working as well as it should be, so you increase your dosage based on your instinct, rather than on careful medical consideration. However, this is dangerous and can lead to major complications.

How to Make the Most of Your Doctor Visits

Every patient-doctor relationship is a bit different, but there are some qualities that are common to all the healthy ones. Sure, your doctor should be competent and you need to follow the prescribed directions, but every face-to-face meeting has the potential to bring more insight and understanding into your illness and treatment.

Preparation is important, but human qualities like personality and consideration are also vital for better communication at your check-ups. Take these tips to improve and simplify dialogue with your doctor:

1. Make a List

It’s hard to recall everything you want to ask when it comes time to meet with your doctor, so record your thoughts in a journal or notepad. Write how you feel each time you take your medication, and list any questions you have in order of priority.

Devote this little book to your COPD symptoms, questions and treatments, and nothing else. This way, everything is always easy to find.

During doctor visits, you can refer to your book to keep you on track. Also, if there is a particularly important piece of information you think you may forget, have your doctor write it directly into your book for you.

Try to write down your questions clearly and separately on the page, so you can jot the answers down right beside them.

2. Ask for Clarification

Doctors and other healthcare professionals have a big medical vocabulary, and they often use uncommon words or phrases to describe an illness. If you don’t understand something or aren’t sure about the instructions, don’t sit in silence. This information is important to your health, and in some cases, it could even save you from a life-threatening emergency.

Speak up when you don’t understand something, and don’t be shy about asking the doctor to explain something a second time. Doctors want you to understand the information, too!

3. Speak Openly and Comfortably

Your doctor is your closest ally when it comes to coping with and treating your COPD, so you should feel completely comfortable when you converse. Be friendly, and take their advice and comfort as you would from a close friend.

If you feel awkward around your doctor, or you don’t trust them with your health, it might be time to find a new one. It’s important to be able to speak freely at your appointments about your concerns (whether regarding treatment, symptoms or financial help), but you should also feel welcome to call them if and when any problems pop up.

It’s natural to respond to authority figures with automatic agreement, but don’t let your respect interfere with your health. If you don’t agree with a suggestion, assessment or command, simply tell your doctor. They will appreciate your interaction, and disagreement doesn’t have to be argumentative!

When talking to your doctor about COPD, they want to help you as much as you want to be helped, so speak up for your health.