Top 6 Diet Triggers for COPD Patients

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Foods to Avoid With COPD

You would think with advances in what we know about COPD and the technologies available today, it would be easy to compile a list of foods that patients should avoid. Unfortunately, it is not that easy; what foods trigger our symptoms is not a one size fits all. Each COPD patient may have different food triggers, but we have compiled a list of common foods to avoid with COPD.

Why Worry About What You Eat?

It's true to say in the respiratory world that nutrition is not often talked about. Many doctors are not trained in nutrition and therefore will rarely refer patients to a nutritional expert. My own experience has revealed nutrition plays an important part in how I feel on a daily basis.

Most respiratory diseases are triggered by inflammation and many foods we eat can induce an inflammatory response in our airways. So would it not make sense to figure out what foods exacerbate our symptoms and then try to eliminate them?

Over the last six months I have gradually stripped foods out of my diet which cause an inflammatory response to my airways and exacerbated my symptoms. By doing this I have reduced my daily symptoms and improved my general wellbeing.

COPD Diet Recommendations

Watch Your Portioning

For years we have been told as patients we should be careful about our portion sizes when we eat, as too much food can make us breathless. So if your portion sizes are small and you are still becoming breathless, maybe it is the food you are eating and not the amount that is causing the issues.

Stay Away From Spices

For many years I ate Thai food as I loved the flavors. The downside was that many of the Thai dishes made me breathless. What became apparent was the dishes which affected me most contained coriander. I now know coriander causes me to become breathless very quickly, therefore I have eliminated it completely from my diet.

While that works for me, I know many patients who do not experience any issues with coriander. What foods react with patients can vary so it's important to find out your own intolerances.

Limit Processed Foods

Processed foods are another source of anxiety for me and many patients. These foods include pasta, rice, bread, and sugar. I know what your thinking — how do you eliminate those foods when they are so commonly used and are very tasty?

For me, it has been a gradual process and one that has reaped benefits. In saying that, I do not think there's anything wrong with eating these types of foods occasionally as a treat; they are just not something I would eat as a regular part of my diet. Again, that works for me, it may not work for all patients.

Top Foods to Ditch With COPD

As mentioned before, every body is different, so people may have different diet triggers, but these ones seem to be the most common:

1. Salt

Since COPD symptoms alone can cause difficulty breathing, it is important to limit salt in your diet. If you eat too much salt, it can lead to water retention, which can cause difficulty breathing.

2. Certain Fruits

These fruits include:

- Apples
- Peaches
- Apricots
- Mangoes

The fruits mentioned above can cause bloating and gas. In turn, this can lead to breathing issues.

3. Certain Vegetables

Much like fruit, there are types of veggies that can cause gas and bloating:

- Beans
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Corn
- Leeks
- Lentils
- Onions
- Peas

4. Dairy

Did you know that dairy products can cause our phlegm to become thicker? Pay attention to see if this happens to you when you eat dairy. If you do not notice a change, this trigger might not affect you.

5. Chocolate

We know that this is a sweet and delicious treat you do not want to miss out on, but be mindful and limit your amount. Many chocolates have caffeine in them, which can interfere with any medication you are taking for COPD.

6. Fried Foods

It's recommended not to eat these foods on a daily basis, even for people without COPD. But for people with COPD fried foods can cause gas and indigestion, which can alter one's ability to breathe.

Professional Guidance

Planning the right nutritional strategy to best manage your disease can be a little tricky so employing the services of a nutrition expert may be of great benefit. A nutritionist can help identify the types of foods that can exacerbate your symptoms. This makes avoiding them less guess work. Portion size and frequency of meals is important and having a professional can make managing meals much easier.

Blood testing such as a CRP blood test can help determine how much inflammation you have in your body and can be a useful tool for accessing the effects of making dietary changes. In my experience, these tests are not widely used for COPD patients. Patients I know who have had these tests done have registered high readings for inflammation.

My personal experience in measuring inflammation after making dietary changes has revealed some stunning results. Over the years, when I have been tested for inflammation, my readings have been excessively high. After undertaking dietary changes and removing foods I react to, my last CRP test produced a very low reading.

Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained

The benefits I have gained by changing the types of food I eat has been extraordinary but that does not mean it will be the same for everyone. However, if you want to better your quality of life, is it not worth exploring all options? Don't go for it alone, talk to your doctor, consult a nutritional expert, and see if this can work for you.

I will not go back to my previous patterns of eating because I feel so much better as a result of my current nutrition. Don't let existing ideas about nutrition determine what will be the best for you, we are all different.