Coping With COPD Oxygen Therapy

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Using COPD Oxygen Therapy

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) makes breathing a struggle, and when breathing is problematic your body struggles to reach the desired level of oxygen in the blood. Your body's organs depend on that oxygen to provide energy — without it your body shuts down.

With the breathing difficulty that is a keystone to COPD, many patients experience symptoms that warrant their doctor prescribing COPD oxygen therapy. Oxygen therapy is the use of an oxygen tank to supplement the oxygen your lungs are able to use from the air. A higher concentration inhaled equals more oxygen available in your body.

When you are first prescribed COPD oxygen therapy, take your time learning about how to use it. Read the instructions carefully and research online.

These devices are designed to be user-friendly and as comfortable as an oxygen tank can be, but it pays to be knowledgeable. Talk to your family and friends and communicate your thoughts and feelings about oxygen therapy so they understand and know what they can do to help.

Don't stop using your oxygen if it feels awkward or uncomfortable. Your doctor prescribed a specific flow of oxygen per minute, and you should use it exactly as recommended.

If you are worried you may run out of oxygen consider oxygen conserving devices (OCD). They are used with a tank or oxygen concentrator so oxygen is delivered only when you inhale, making the supply of oxygen last longer. Make sure you get the oxygen saturation tested (at rest and with activity) when you first get an OCD to make sure you are breathing enough oxygen, and ensure you find the best portable oxygen concentrator for you.

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Although oxygen therapy is an effective strategy to reduce symptoms and improve health, many people with COPD feel embarrassed or ashamed by their need for this treatment. These feelings can lead to depression, anxiety and isolation. The oxygen will improve your quantity of life, but it is your assignment to improve your quality of life. Here's how:

Acknowledge and Accept

Denial and avoidance are the enemy of happiness. Of course you don't like the idea of oxygen therapy — you would prefer to not require this level of treatment. But you do.

Voice your frustrations to those around you rather than suppressing the feelings. Experiencing sadness and anger is natural after any loss, and having to use oxygen equates to a loss of independence and mobility.

Change Your Own Perceptions

Do not see life as black and white or good and bad. It is true you lose some freedom with oxygen, but the loss is not total.

You remain able to go places and do things that you enjoy. Many people report having increased energy and motivation after beginning oxygen therapy because their bodies are performing at higher levels.

Perceptions are powerful because focusing on the negatives will make them large, while focusing on the positives will emphasize those aspects instead. Work to control your perceptions.

Change Others' Perceptions

When you are out in the community, people may look at you oddly or be surprised to see your tank. This uncomfortable experience leads some to turn inwards and can spark feelings of shame.

Instead of retreating into yourself, try taking an active and assertive approach. If you notice someone reacting to you, approach them in a calm way.

Chances are that their reactions stem from curiosity as opposed to any type of harsh judgment. Provide them with information regarding your COPD and the oxygen tank.

Educating others is a fantastic way to advocate for yourself. As you work to change the perceptions of others, your own views will become more positive and stable.

Be Adventurous

Anxiety is commonly associated with COPD, and tells you that certain situations or activities are too risky and should be avoided. Unless you push back against anxiety, your world becomes smaller.

Check with your doctor, and if activity is not flagged, go for it. There will be some setbacks along the way but the benefits outweigh the risks.

Be Safe With COPD Oxygen Therapy

Oxygen therapy does have a set of cautions surrounding it, most notably the danger of oxygen around open flames. Keep away from candles, campfires and cigarettes to maintain your safety.

Being prescribed oxygen therapy can feel like a loss. Take a period of time to grieve and then move forward. Finding ways to stay active while reducing negative feelings will make great improvements to your quality of life. Your tank will feel more like a sidekick than an anchor.