

COPD AND ME

3. Self-Management

Having a chronic condition like COPD can affect every aspect of your life and you may find that things you used to do can become more difficult. Self-management is about increasing your knowledge and skills in order to manage your COPD and feel more in control of things. Healthcare professionals can provide education, information and support to help you feel more confident in better managing your condition. A COPD Self-Management Plan can be developed with your healthcare professional. This will help you to manage your condition when you're well and to be aware of your symptoms and know what to do in the event of an exacerbation (flare up) of your COPD.

What can I do?

There is a lot you can do to manage your symptoms, prevent exacerbations (flare ups) and improve your fitness including:

- **Understanding COPD:** it is important to understand as much as you can about your COPD.
- **Role of medications and inhalers:** it is important to know about your medicines, how they work, how to take them. Make sure you are taking your inhalers correctly and that your inhaler technique is checked regularly. Always make sure you have enough of your medicines and never run out.
- **Smoking cessation:** if you smoke, stopping smoking is the most important thing you can do to improve your health. Stopping smoking will improve your cough and phlegm production. There are many supports available to help with smoking cessation
- **Emotional health:** take care of your feelings. Living with a long-term illness is not easy and can make people feel low and anxious. It

is important to take care of your emotional health and there are supports available.

- **Avoiding exacerbations (flare ups):** recognise your symptoms, know what is usual for you. Monitor your symptoms and ensure you know when you may need to alter your medication or start treatment early for exacerbations. Know when and how to seek help. You can discuss this with your healthcare professional using a COPD Self-Management Plan to guide you.
- **Breathing exercises and chest clearance:** use controlled breathing techniques and chest clearance to help you get rid of phlegm and also help with relaxation techniques.
- **Exercise:** regular exercise is important - even a small amount of exercise is of benefit. Exercise contributes to improving your general feeling of wellbeing. It can also help you sleep better at night and it is very beneficial in strengthening the big muscle groups (Section 5).
- **Nutrition:** try to eat a well-balanced diet, eating little and often rather than having big meals. Try to maintain a healthy weight. Ensure you drink plenty of fluids, particularly during exacerbation (flare up).
- **Vaccinations:** It is important that you get the flu vaccine every year. (and a pneumonia vaccination - your healthcare professional will tell you how often you need this.
- **Relaxation techniques:** relaxation techniques can help with breathlessness, feelings of anxiety or during times of exacerbations.
- **Rest:** ensure you get good sleep and plenty of rest particularly during times of exacerbations.
- **Equipment:** if using any medical equipment, for example nebulisers or oxygen, it is very important to ensure they are serviced regularly, and that masks and mouthpieces are cleaned and changed frequently.

- **Triggers:** know what it is that can trigger an exacerbation or flare-up and how to avoid these. For example, avoid smoky environments and pollutants like dust, smog, or foggy weather.
- **Bone health:** As we get older we are at risk of osteoporosis which is a weakening of the bone. A number of factors contribute to osteoporosis in people with COPD but these can be monitored and there are many things you can do to improve and maintain bone health. Discuss exercise and vitamin supplements with your healthcare professional.

Need our help? Call the COPD ADVICELINE 1800 831 2146