

INSPIRATION COPD NEWSLETTER

Respiratory Health Association's newsletter for people living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), their families, and caregivers

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WHAT IS COPD?

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a combination of lung damage and mucus production that makes it hard to breathe. COPD is used to describe emphysema, chronic bronchitis or a combination of the two. Symptoms include cough, shortness of breath, wheezing and chest tightness.

What to Know About Palliative Care

Palliative care is a branch of medicine that focuses on pain and symptom management, care coordination, caregiver support, and making life with a chronic condition more comfortable. It also considers a person's physical, psychological, practical, and spiritual needs. While commonly, but erroneously, referenced as end-of-life care, it can and should be integrated into the care plan as early as possible to alleviate the burdensome/troublesome symptoms of chronic conditions like COPD. Palliative care is available in many healthcare settings such as doctors' offices, hospitals, cancer and dialysis centers, and through home health agencies. It incorporates the needs, goals, and preferences of the patient, their family, and caregivers.

Even with treatment plans in place to manage COPD, palliative approaches can help alleviate symptoms. To help ease breathlessness, the Global Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD) Report recommends neuromuscular electrical stimulation, chest wall vibrations, medications, and even fans blowing air onto the face. Non-pharmacological treatments include acupuncture or acupressure. Nutritional support may also play a role in palliative treatment plans. Proper nutrition promotes healthy caloric intake and can lead to muscle strength improvement.

Breathe Easier This Summer

Navigating COVID-19 Moving Forward

COPD flare-ups and exacerbations are common in extreme weather. As the summer months approach, it's important to know why hotter weather affects the lungs and how to prepare for changing temperatures. When temperatures rise, a person with COPD has a harder time cooling their body down because of the limited airflow. Hot weather and heat waves have been shown to worsen breathlessness, coughs, and chest tightness. It doesn't matter if you live in areas with humidity or dry heat, it's important to take steps to protect your lungs. First and foremost, continue to take all prescribed medications unless instructed otherwise by your physician. Limit or avoid drinks that can cause dehydration such as coffee, tea, and alcohol. Drink plenty of water but check with your doctor about any fluid restrictions you may have. Be smart about sun exposure; exercise, garden, or do other outdoor activities in the cooler parts of the day. Stay inside with windows and doors closed on particularly hot days, but make sure to turn on your air conditioning or fans.

Even though COVID-19 restrictions have lifted in most parts of the country, and life has started to return to pre-pandemic levels, we must acknowledge that the virus is still around. New variants may arise, and guidance will continue to change but we remain equipped with tools to help us navigate COVID-19.

Remain aware of the COVID-19 rates in your community. Consider continuing to wear masks inside on crowded places such as the grocery stores. Check your local health department's website to monitor any spikes in infection rates. If you notice rates are starting to increase again, it is a good idea to bring back old habits like wearing a mask, keeping your distance, and frequently washing your hands. In fact, some of these habits like hand washing should become part of our way of life.

At home COVID-19 tests are more readily available and a limited number of tests can be ordered through the government. Take advantage of ordering your free at home test kits by visiting www.covid.gov or by calling 1-800-232-0233. If you feel ill and your at-home test results are positive, call your provider to discuss the best next steps as there may be additional medications or other treatments you may qualify for. Vaccination remains the best way to protect yourself from COVID-19. If you haven't received the vaccines or boosters yet, know that you can schedule an appointment any time if you change your mind. If you qualify for the 4th booster, consider completing it.





What to Know About Palliative Care (Continued)

Additionally, palliative care may address a person's emotional and spiritual needs through cognitive behavioral therapy and mind-body activities. These activities may help improve anxiety, depression, and stress, and include talk therapy, yoga, relaxation, and mindfulness .

When you meet with your doctor, you'll talk about palliative care's many components. Symptom management is one of the main points to discuss. Speak with your provider about what symptoms you are experiencing and what you would like to focus on. Your doctor may also talk to you about available social supports – respite and other caregiver resources, financial support, spiritual questions, and general advice about what living with COPD entails. Other elements of palliative care include care techniques, referrals to specialists, and advance care planning .

An additional offering palliative care medicine is hospice. Hospice care is for people who are approaching end of life. Hospice typically signals the end of treatments designed to cure or remedy the chronic illness, and instead focus upon comfort care and symptom management. Hospice care can be provided at home; or in assisted living facilities, hospice facilities, hospitals, or nursing homes. Hospice teams work together to provide the patients, their families, and caregivers with the

Did You Know Our Caregiver's Toolkit is Available Online?

Providing care for a loved one living with COPD can be hard, but Respiratory Health Association's Caregiver's Toolkit has information and resources to help you along the way. Thanks to our partnership with the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's (NHLBI) Learn More Breathe Better® program, the toolkit is now available online!

Learn more at resphealth.org/copdtoolkit or by scanning the QR code.



physical, emotional, and spiritual support they may need.

Despite these benefits, many people forego palliative care. This can be due to discomfort over the subject matter (am I entering a new phase of my disease?) and uncertainty over the availability of resources and who the best healthcare provider is to coordinate such resources. While palliative care may be a sensitive topic, it's important to speak with your provider about your goals and wishes when it comes to your own health . Palliative care can help navigate the progression of your COPD.

Speaking with your healthcare provider about palliative care doesn't have to be intimidating or scary; and it can be empowering. When speaking with your doctor or healthcare provider, be sure to emphasize what is important to you - quality of life, pain management, or something else. Knowing what your options are can help you make informed decisions.

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This newsletter is not intended to provide specific medical advice, but general information for people living with OPD and their caregivers. If you think you may have COPD, talk to your healthcare provider.

If you would like to receive more information for people living with COPD, please visit resphealth.org/copd.

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