



Managing COPD in a Skilled Nursing Setting



Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is an umbrella term for a variety of progressive lung diseases including emphysema, chronic bronchitis, refractory asthma, and cystic fibrosis. According to one study, approximately 20 percent of skilled nursing facility residents have a diagnosis of COPD and it is the third leading cause of deaths in America.

Because of its prevalence, managing COPD has become a priority for many nursing facilities across the country. Here are some ways they are working to improve the lives of those living with COPD:

Pulmonary exercises

Breathing techniques such as pursed-lip breathing and diaphragmatic breathing are two exercises that can help people with COPD. It is best to get instruction from a trained health care professional on both of these techniques. Before beginning any breathing technique, it helps to let go of stress. Drop your shoulders (where many people hold stress), close your eyes and relax.

Pursed-lip breathing

Breathe in through your nose for about two seconds. Pucker your lips as if you were getting ready to blow out a candle. Breathe out very slowly. Try to make your exhale last about 2-3 times longer than your inhale. According to the COPD Foundation, pursed-lip breathing has the following benefits:

- Slows down your breathing
- Keeps airways open longer
- Eases the difficulty in breathing
- Improves the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide

Diaphragmatic breathing

Also known as abdominal/belly breathing, this technique is similar to pursed-lip breathing, but with a few additions. Begin by placing one hand on your chest and the other on your belly. Inhale through your nose for about two seconds. As you breathe in, concentrate on moving your belly outward. Your belly should be moving more than your chest. Exhale through pursed lips while gently pushing in on your belly.

Medical devices

Devices such as the Positive Expiratory Pressure (PEP) device are used to clear secretions from airways, making it easier to breathe. The resident exhales into the device using a mask.

Medication

There is no cure for COPD, but there are medications patients can take which can help ease symptoms,

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Three Things Patients Should Know About Cataracts

The American Academy of Ophthalmology (AOA) shares facts about the eye condition and the surgery used to treat it.



Michael Sargent's vision had become so impaired by cataracts that he couldn't distinguish shapes or colors without his glasses on, even if objects were right in front of him. His ophthalmologist recommended cataract surgery.

Approximately 25 million Americans have cataracts, which cause cloudy, blurry or dim vision and often develop with advancing age. As we grow older, the lenses of our eyes thicken and become cloudier. Eventually, we may find it more difficult to read street signs. Colors may seem dull. These symptoms may signal cataracts, which affect about 70 percent of people by age 75.

Fortunately, cataracts can be corrected with surgery. Ophthalmologists, physicians who specialize in medical and surgical eye care, perform around three million cataract surgeries each year to restore vision to those patients.

The AOA says that everyone should know three things about the condition and its treatment:

1. Age isn't the only risk factor for cataracts.

Though most everyone will develop cataracts with age, recent studies show that lifestyle and behavior can influence when and how severely you develop cataracts. Diabetes, extensive exposure to sunlight, smoking, obesity and high blood pressure have all been linked to increased risk of cataracts. Eye injuries, prior eye surgery and long-term use of

steroid medication can also result in cataracts. If you have any of these or other risk factors, talk to an ophthalmologist.

2. Cataracts cannot be prevented, but you can lower your risk. Wearing UV-blocking sunglasses and brimmed hats when outside can help. Several studies suggest that eating more vitamin C-rich foods may delay how fast cataracts form. Also, avoid smoking cigarettes, which have been shown to increase the risk of cataract development.

3. Surgery may help improve more than just your vision. During the procedure, the natural clouded lens is replaced with an artificial lens called an intraocular lens, which should improve your vision significantly. Patients have a variety of lenses to choose from, each with different benefits. Studies have shown that cataract surgery can improve quality of life and reduce the risk of falling. If cataracts are interfering with your ability to see well, consider asking your ophthalmologist about cataract surgery.

"Having the surgery was life-changing," said Michael Sargent. "I can see everything from the time on my alarm clock to a bird's nest in a tree hundreds of feet away without glasses. It's the most amazing experience I've ever had."

Learn more about cataract symptoms, treatment and types of intraocular lenses on the American Academy of Ophthalmology website (www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/what-are-cataracts).

Source: The American Academy of Ophthalmology. Seniors concerned that they may have cataracts may qualify for a no-cost eye exam through EyeCare America, a public service program of the American Academy of Ophthalmology. EyeCare America offers eye exams and care at no out-of-pocket cost for eligible seniors age 65 and older. Visit www.aao.org/eyecare-america for more information.

Aging & Caregiving in the News

Information, updates and interesting tidbits from across the country and around the world.

- Eat blueberries for a healthier heart
- Another reason to put away your smartphone
- Avoiding medical jargon

These Little Berries Provide a Big Nutritional Payoff



Blueberries are so yummy! And according to nutrition expert Sarah Johnson (above), they also offer a big boost for heart health. (Photo: Bill Lax/Florida State University.)

We're always looking for a "superfood" — one that offers a nutritional wallop for its size. Sarah A. Johnson, assistant director of the Florida State University Center for Advancing Exercise and Nutrition Research, recently conducted a study confirming that blueberries should be on that list. Participants in previous studies on blueberries were instructed to consume quite a large amount of the fruit, more than most of us would be willing to down in a day. But in Johnson's study, a group of older women who consumed the equivalent of only one cup of blueberries each day significantly lowered their blood pressure and arterial stiffness, both of which are associated with cardiovascular disease. What a delicious way to improve our health! Eat blueberries on cereal, in a smoothie, in a salad, or by the handful for a helping of healthful nutrients.

Another Reason Not to Walk and Text (Or Talk)

It's a familiar sight of our times: Pedestrians walking down the street talking on their smartphones, or even texting while walking. Safety experts tell us walking while texting or talking on a phone raises the risk of falls considerably for people of every age. The risk is highest for seniors, and studies show that these days, older adults are almost as likely to practice this unsafe multitasking. Now, a new study from Hiram College in Ohio offers yet another reason to leave your phone in your pocket during your next stroll. Michael Rebold, Ph.D., who is an assistant professor of integrative exercise, found that using a smartphone while exercising lowers the intensity of our workout. Rebold reports that listening to music doesn't have the same effect. So tell your friend you'll call back later, and listen to some energizing tunes instead.

Experts: Many Seniors Missing Out on Doctors Urged to Avoid "Medspeak"

By the time they walk across the stage with their newly minted medical degrees, doctors have picked up an impressive vocabulary of medical terms, all very important for diagnosing and treating disease. But are technical medical terms as useful for talking with patients? Not so much, says the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). The federal agency recently issued a set of guidelines to help healthcare professionals better communicate with patients, and many of these suggestions are especially important for older adults. The communication strategies include listening carefully to the patient, using plain, non-medical language, speaking clearly and not too fast, encouraging questions, and using graphics and demonstrations.

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reduce the frequency and severity of attacks and keep the disease from getting worse. Some common medications include bronchodilators, which are inhalers that open airways and make breathing easier. They provide short-term relief from a shortness of breath. Corticosteroids, which may come in the form of an inhaler, pill, powder or liquid, are used to reduce inflamed airways.

Nutrition

Skilled nursing facilities are generally keenly aware of making nutritious choices for residents, which includes eating a balanced diet of fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, healthy fats, and whole grains with lots of fiber. Eating nutritiously boosts a resident's overall wellness, making them less prone to getting sick. It can also help with maintaining a healthy weight, which goes a long way in helping people live well with COPD. Being too heavy means a person is carrying around extra weight, which can make the heart and lungs work harder, creating a shortness of breath. Being underweight might make a person feel weak and tired, potentially increasing the risk of getting an infection.

Prevention

It is generally recommended that people with COPD get vaccinated for the flu, pneumonia and whooping cough, all of which can complicate COPD symptoms. Skilled nursing residents should always check with their doctor to see if these vaccinations are safe for them. Residents should also follow standard protocols for minimizing exposure to germs, including washing hands regularly.

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