

Living with COPD



November is COPD Awareness month: What is COPD and how can we help our members with COPD.

November 18th is the Great American Smokeout. The American Cancer Society is marking the 35th Great American Smokeout by encouraging smokers to use the date to make a plan to quit or to

quit smoking on that day. Quitting smoking can reduce the risk of cancer and COPD.

You may refer members to the ACW website for more information: www.cancer.org. A special thanks to Denine Rogers, Registered Dietician for writing this month's article.

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What is COPD?



November is Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) Awareness Month and signifies the importance of this major cause of disability in the United States. Currently more than 12 million people are diagnosed with the disease and it is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States. Because COPD develops slowly, many more people may have the disease and not even know it.

About the Disease

COPD is a progressive disease that decreases the lungs' operating ability and the bronchial ventilation function making it hard to breathe. This causes permanent changes in the structure of the lungs and bronchi. COPD symptoms may not be present initially but often worsen over time and can limit the ability to do routine activities - i.e. tire easily while exercising or doing strenuous work. Common symptoms of COPD include coughing that produces large amounts of mucus, wheezing, shortness of breath and chest tightness, to name a few.

Cause & Cure

While COPD isn't communicable, the leading cause is known - cigarette smoking. Most people who have COPD currently smoke or have smoked in the past. Other contributing factors of COPD are long-term exposure to other lung irritants such as air pollution, chemical fumes or dust. COPD is usually diagnosed in middle-aged or older people.

Treatment Options

COPD has no cure yet and doctors don't know how to reverse the damage to the airways and lungs. However, there are treatments and lifestyle changes that can help members feel better, stay more active, and slow the progress of the disease. Some of the treatments are:

Smoking Cessation:

Quitting smoking is the most important step to take in treating COPD. Members should talk with their doctor about the many programs and products that can assist with quitting.

Seek Support:

Additionally, many hospitals or health clinics have programs that help people quit smoking, or healthcare staff that can refer members to a program. Members should also be sure to enlist the help of family members and friends to support efforts to quit.

Avoid Secondhand Smoke:

Given that this is a known cause and continual airway irritant, members with COPD should try to avoid secondhand smoke.

Medications:

Other treatments for COPD may include medicines such as bronchodilators and inhaled glucocorticosteroids (steroids), vaccines, pulmonary rehabilitation (rehab), oxygen therapy, and surgery. Doctors also may recommend tips for managing COPD complications.



Nutritional Therapy

Lifestyle changes (particularly in regards to nutrition) are very important for a member diagnosed with COPD. The major presenting symptoms of COPD are shortness of breath, coughing and chest discomfort. These symptoms, along with the large amount of energy used just to breathe, make it difficult for those diagnosed with the disease to eat enough to maintain their weight. As a result, malnutrition and corresponding weight loss are quite common. It is highly recommended that members with COPD request a nutritional assessment/consult with a Registered Dietitian for nutritional therapeutic care.

Nutritional therapy goals for a member with COPD include the following dietary recommendations:

- Adequate calories, protein, vitamins and minerals
- Small, frequent meals with nutrient-dense foods such as peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
- High-calorie, high-protein, liquid nutritional supplements or smoothies and milk shakes to the diet.
- Foods that require little preparation.

- Timing the main meal to correspond to the time of day when the member's energy level is the highest.
- Resting before mealtime.
- A daily multivitamin and mineral supplement.

Conclusion

Early diagnosis is key in helping members with COPD (and those at risk) to become more aware of their symptoms and gain a better understanding of simple tips to improve their quality of life with this disease.

