

Caring for Someone with COPD

Learn four tips for providing care for someone with COPD, including ways to find support through the process.

COPD stands for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. It's a term that includes several different progressive lung diseases, including emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and non-reversible asthma. If you're caring for someone with COPD, you play a crucial role in their health and wellness. Whether you're new to caregiving or have been in the role for a while, the following tips will help you be the best COPD caregiver you can be – and find some much-deserved support in the process.

1. Value Your Role

Don't think of yourself as "just" a caregiver. You're an important healthcare advocate for the person under your care. You're also a vital member of their care team, which includes the doctors and other medical professionals working together to help manage the COPD. Since caregivers are on the frontlines of managing the illness, the COPD Foundation encourages them to become well-versed in the treatment plan for the person they're caring for. You should also feel comfortable knowing how to use any medical equipment if the person you're caring for requires any.

2. Be Observant

COPD is a progressive disease, and you should watch for any new signs that it's getting worse. Pay close attention to how the person you're caring for may change from one visit to the next. If you notice any of these changes as time goes on, alert other members of the care team:

- ✓ Worsening symptoms (shortness of breath, wheezing or chronic cough)
- ✓ Increased fatigue
- ✓ A harder time doing exercises or other daily activities
- ✓ More frequent trips to clinics or hospitals
- ✓ Increased struggle in daily activities, such as going up or downstairs, dressing or showering
- ✓ Increased depression or anxiety

When you have an understanding of what's changed, you're better able to talk to your family member or friend's care team about their health status. This can help you get new and better treatment options for the person under your care.

3. Stay Informed

One of the most important things you can do if you're caring for someone with COPD is to simply be informed. Luckily, there are many resources to help educate yourself about COPD. The COPD Foundation site is an excellent place to start, and you may find their online community, called "COPD360social" to be particularly helpful. Here, you can join community chats, ask questions, search for existing threads on different topics, and learn about events in your area.

The CDC (which refers to COPD as one of the "most urgent health concerns facing Americans") is another good place to find the latest in data, research and resources.

4. Seek Support

The American Lung Association (ALA) launched its "Better Breathers Club" more than forty years ago to offer in-person support groups to COPD patients and their caregivers. The ALA also offers online support groups, as does the COPD Foundation. Search their websites for more information or additional resources in your community, and then take advantage of them. Being a COPD caregiver can be hard. It's also a wonderful expression of the love you have for the person under your care. Be sure to make the most of the support available to you.

Sources:

COPD Foundation

<https://www.copdfoundation.org/>

COPD Foundation: COPD 360

<https://www.copdfoundation.org/COPD360social/Community/Get-Involved.aspx>

CDC on COPD

<https://www.cdc.gov/copd/index.html>

American Lung Association

<https://www.lung.org/support-and-community/better-breathers-club/>

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