

Diet & COPD

Help manage symptoms with healthy eating habits

MAINTAINING A HEALTHY AND BALANCED LIFESTYLE is a good idea for everybody, but if you are an individual with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), you need to be especially attuned to how your choices, particularly when it comes to diet, affect your health and COPD symptoms.

COPD encompasses a range of progressive lung diseases, such as emphysema, chronic bronchitis and non-reversible asthma. It is characterized by increasing breathlessness, frequent coughing, wheezing and tightness in the chest. It's estimated that 24 million Americans have COPD, and half of those cases are undiagnosed.

Most COPD patients are aware of the environmental factors and personal choices that can exacerbate symptoms. Such triggers include air pollution, hot and cold weather extremes, and smoking. However, fewer individuals are aware that eating and drinking habits can also affect breathing. Knowing what's good and bad for your body will allow you to make smart and healthy food choices that will keep you breathing easy.

Your first step should be to talk to your care provider about food preferences, your daily eating and exercising habits, and any dietary restrictions. This is a good starting point for creating a food plan that is specific to your needs. A registered dietician (RD) who specializes in COPD or a respiratory therapist (RT) will be able to direct you towards the right foods.

There are many components involved in a dietary regimen. Here are several you should keep in mind and discuss with your care provider so you can be sure you are eating right for the management of your COPD:

Calories. The amount of calories you consume translates to how much energy you have. And believe it or not, people with COPD can burn 10 times as many calories breathing as a healthy person does. Do you lose weight easily? Or do you find yourself gaining weight? This is a good starting point for gauging whether you are taking in the proper amount.

Protein. Your muscles get their strength from protein. As somebody with COPD, it's important that you consume protein at least twice a day in order to strengthen your respiratory muscles. Some excellent sources of protein include dairy products, meat, poultry, seafood, nuts and legumes such as dried lentils and peas.

Fluids. It's important to drink lots of water, which helps to keep mu-



cus thin and can decrease inflammation. Aim for six to eight glasses of water a day, and remember that healthy liquids, like teas, can count towards your fluid goals.

Sodium. Sodium can counteract the benefits of proper hydration. It can cause irritation, inflammation and swelling. Talk to your doctor about how much you should be consuming, and be leery of cooking with store-bought spice blends that tend to have a lot of excess salt.

Fats. The amount of fat each person should consume can vary, but if your RT advises you to increase your fat intake, make sure it's the polyunsaturated kind. Polyunsaturated fats contain no cholesterol, and include liquid vegetable oils, soft margarines and mayonnaise made from plant oils. Avoid trans-fat whenever possible.

Meals. Eat four to six small meals a day, instead of two or three large ones. After you've eaten a large meal, your stomach presses up against the space under your diaphragm and can keep you from taking deep and full breaths. Try to rest before a meal, and avoid gassy foods such as broccoli, carbonated drinks, cauliflower and beans which can cause added discomfort.

Weight. Weigh yourself regularly, and if you notice a continual increase or decrease while you are following your recommended diet, consult your care provider.

Every person with COPD is different, and certain nutritional guidelines will be effective for some and not for others. Pay attention to your body before and after you eat, and be sure to consult a nutritionist or RT so you can develop a plan that will work best for you.

*Information provided by the American Lung Association.
Visit www.lung.org.*

EDITOR'S NOTE: Your doctor, therapist, or sleep technologist has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about an issue related to your health. It is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your doctor, therapist, or sleep technologist. Look under the "Education" tab at advanceweb.com/respiratory for more educational handouts.
