



I've Got Those **COPD Blues...**

"Overcoming Depression"

All of us like to be able to do what we want to do, when we want to do it. Many people work hard their entire lives, looking forward to the day when they can retire and do just that. People with chronic conditions such as COPD and other lung diseases may find that their illness imposes several limits on what they are able to do. As a result, they can become anxious, angry, and depressed.

Our emotional and mental states are closely tied to our physical condition. Any problems in one area are likely to affect the others. For example, anxiety has direct impact on breathing – ask any patient with asthma. And concurrently, difficult breathing worsens anxiety. Both anxiety and difficult breathing affect our mental status.

The patient can feel trapped in a downward spiral of "When I have trouble breathing, I start getting depressed. And when I get depressed, I don't take my medicine or use my oxygen and it makes my breathing even worse, which makes me more depressed."



Although it is understandable how this can happen, it is not acceptable. These patterns must be broken so that patients can lead happy, fulfilled lives. Many patients with COPD continue to maintain a high quality of life despite their condition. What are their secrets?

- **Stay Active** – COPD is not a life sentence to be stuck in the recliner. I have personally known many patients using oxygen that continue to maintain an active lifestyle including travel, work, hunting, golf, gardening, and other recreational activities. I know of one lady in Colorado who continued to climb mountains. They have simply refused to allow their condition to stop them. Did they have to adapt their activities? Sure. Is it an inconvenience to tote their portable oxygen? Absolutely. But the results are more than worth it. If you have been inactive for some time, you must be realistic and take a gradual approach to increasing your activity a little each day. Talk to your doctor or sign up for a pulmonary rehabilitation program for help in designing an exercise program that will get you up and out of that recliner. It can happen!
- **Attitude** – Do you have a glass half-empty or a glass half-full attitude? Glass half-empty people always look at what they can't do rather than what they can. Because this is their focus, they often give up because, "I just can't do what I used to do." Glass half-full people always focus on what they can do. They never

give up because their focus is on the activities they can still do. And they are creative about finding new ways to do things that they enjoy doing. I've worked with wonderful patients that have devised oxygen tank holders for their lawn mowers because they like mowing their yard and don't want to quit. Others take their oxygen tank to the garden with a 50-foot tubing so they can continue gardening. One man took his oxygen along deer hunting and got a deer! Another found a site where he could back his camper up close to the water's edge so he could continue fishing. Some have fashioned waist or back packs to leave their hands free for other activities. The point is, Don't give up! Where there's a will there's a way!

- **Take Your Medicines** – Taking your treatment as ordered by your doctor will help prevent shortness of breath and unnecessary hospital visits. Many patients fall into bad habits of only using medications or oxygen when they feel they need it. This pattern can lead to poor management of your condition and frequent problems. Many medications are designed to be preventative and will not work as well when taken “as needed.”
- **Socialize** – Everyone needs someone to talk to. We need to share our hopes and joys as well as our challenges. This can be difficult when activity is restricted and leaving your home is harder. Pick and plan your outings so you will be well prepared. Focus on the activities that you enjoy most and allow time with your friends such as church, school events, or events with your family.
- **Be a Giver** – Don't spend too much time focusing on yourself and your problems. Find a way to help someone else. One lady that was nearly home bound, drew small cards that she sent to her friends to brighten their day. Another gentleman made coasters and napkin holders that he gave away. A dear friend of mine that never gave up despite severe COPD and being on continuous oxygen for 12 years continued serving on the garden club, historic society, church groups, and other civic causes.
- **Appearance** – Many people are afraid of what people may think or say if they see those using oxygen or having problems. Many people refuse to use their oxygen in public for this very reason. Don't allow fear or pride to stop you. Your friends and family will certainly be supportive. People may look at first, but let them look. If a small child says something about that tube in your nose, just smile and explain that it helps you to breathe.
- **Be Knowledgeable** – Fear, anxiety, and depression often come from “not knowing.” People that don't understand their condition may develop irrational fears of what might happen. Read all you can about your condition and ask lots of questions. Knowing how to better manage your condition will give you a heightened sense of being in control, which helps to prevent fear and anxiety.
- **Seek Help** – If depression continues, get professional help. Talk to your doctor about medications that can help. Talk to your clergy or obtain counseling. Some pulmonary rehab programs have counseling programs specifically for people with breathing difficulties. In the words of Churchill: “Never, never, never give up.”