

## Helping Your Elderly Parent with COPD Related Depression

Experts say that over a million people in the United States have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). It is a chronic lung condition that includes bronchitis, emphysema or both.

COPD affects the airways and air sacs within the lungs, which makes breathing difficult and can result in a person becoming less active over time. An elderly person who has COPD will easily become depressed, when dealing not only with breathing difficulties but other age related problems.

One example of COPD related depression is Martin, age 72. Martin had lived a busy lifestyle, playing golf, volunteering at the community center and working in his garden. Diagnosed with COPD six months previous, and uncertain how to manage his breathing difficulty and new medications, Martin stopped all his activities. Giving up the things he loved to do and sitting more at home along with improper diet, he became a victim to depression.

Martin's son Anthony realized that his father could not handle his new situation and depression alone. A trip together to Martin's physician began the steps to dissipating the depression and enabling Martin to return to his social life.

Anthony received instructions about his father's medications from the doctor and how they were to be used and consequently could help his father with medication reminders.

The most common types of daily COPD medicines are:

- Inhaler for daily maintenance - Bronchodilators help relax the muscles around the lungs' breathing tubes. This reduces shortness of breath and makes breathing easier.
- Steroids - Corticosteroids, taken in pill form or inhaler reduce swelling in breathing tubes to quickly make breathing easier. Not commonly for prolonged use.
- Oxygen Treatment - Severe COPD will reduce your lungs' ability to put oxygen into your blood to be carried throughout your body. Martin's oxygen level was measured to determine if he would need prescribed oxygen therapy. Oxygen is usually prescribed if the oxygen in the blood is low during sleep, exercise, or while not active. A respiratory therapist from an oxygen supply company or home health service can help with learning how to use oxygen.

An important factor in Martin's depression and COPD management was his diet.

"A healthy diet can play an important role in the management and treatment of COPD.

Finding the right diet can be tricky for people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), since they need to eat a healthy diet and maintain their optimal weight to keep COPD symptoms in check." )Krisha McCoy, MS, Lindsey Marcellin, MD, MPH)

Maintaining the right nutrition and taking vitamins not only keeps the body healthy but heals the mind, providing emotional well being. Fad diets or extreme dieting are not appropriate for COPD patients. Extreme weight loss can be as much a hazard as being overweight. A home care nutritionist can help establish a healthy menu and diet plan.

With medication and diet under control the final steps to overcoming Martin's depression were to return to his daily activities. With COPD, an elderly person is more hesitant to leave home, especially if that person's breathing capacity is not as it used to be. There is a lot of available mobility support for the elderly with small portable oxygen units, walkers, electric scooters and other supportive equipment to help these disabled people move about in the community.

With the help of mobile services and his son at his side to start with, Martin returned to the golf course and community activities. His new diet and return to previous activity helped Martin overcome his symptoms of depression.

Studies show that the intervention of family and friends in helping and supporting elderly people with COPD results in a decrease of depression and a healthier outcome for the patient.

The Oxford Journals Medicine and Ageing states

“It is also worth exploring how family and friends may be involved in supporting the patient and to encourage social interaction. Educating the spouse, family members and friends about depression may help them to understand the consequences of the disease and to develop coping strategies and in turn may reduce the likelihood of isolation. A very recent study that investigated the benefits of emotional support by family and friends and of spiritual beliefs in patients with major depression showed that those with higher perceived emotional support had better outcomes.” (Oxford Journals Medicine Age and Ageing Volume 35, Number 5)

If you are helping an elder parent with COPD related depression there are community and professional services to help you. Start with your parent’s physician. You can also find resources for oxygen therapy, homecare respiratory treatment, home nursing, home medical equipment and mobile services.

The [National Care Planning Council](#) promotes eldercare resources and lists eldercare services throughout the United States.