

COPD

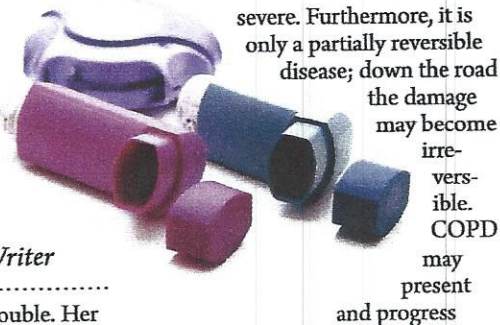
A Cause of Distress

By Jean Jeffers, Staff Writer

Margie is a woman in trouble. Her chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is in an advanced state. Margie is short of breath (SOB), especially with exertion, and she fatigues easily, meaning that simple household chores deplete her energy. Consequently, she needs homemaker services to provide meals, perform personal care, and finish household tasks. She can no longer drive a car and depends on her grandson for rides. Margie is isolated, afraid of what is to come.

COPD is a disabling disease in which two respiratory conditions — chronic bronchitis and emphysema — combine. One may occur without the other in obstructive disease of the lungs, but usually in COPD they manifest together.

Dr. Bruce Broudy, a pulmonologist and staff physician at Lexington Clinic, states that COPD runs on a spectrum from mild to moderate to



severe. Furthermore, it is only a partially reversible disease; down the road the damage may become irreversible. COPD may present and progress quickly to severe disease, or it may slowly worsen. Early treatment is recommended to allow easier breathing.

In the 1960s, COPD was seen primarily as a disease of 'hard-living, booze-loving old men,' usually persons who had smoked almost all their lives.

Not so today! COPD is on the rise in our society. There are currently about 240 million people with COPD worldwide, and the condition has increased markedly in women, due mainly to the increased percentage of women who smoke. In the US, more than 35 million suffer from this disease. It is the fourth leading cause of death for Americans.

In bronchitis, the bronchial tree is inflamed from some irritant, such as cigarette smoking. Bronchi (walls of airways) narrow in response to the irritation, mucus is produced and this

combination of red swollen bronchi plus mucus sets up a situation of coughing, wheezing and SOB. In the end, the individual struggles to breathe.

Emphysema has its focus in the alveoli (air sacs). In the normal lung, air introduced into the lungs goes through the bronchial tree to the alveoli deep within the lungs; air enters from the bronchi and goes to the alveoli, and there is transferred from these sacs to the bloodstream, allowing oxygen to nourish the cells of the body. Carbon dioxide is thereby removed.

In the compromised lung, there are usually repeated respiratory infections and more mucus. The passage of air becomes obstructed. When air does reach the alveoli, they become stretched and over-inflated by trapped air. Gradually this causes the alveoli to lose their elasticity, making it hard to transport oxygen to the blood. The existing alveoli are slowly destroyed, leaving holes in the lungs with resultant breathlessness, coughing and wheezing. The common "barrel chest" may be evidenced. Patients take rapid, shallow breaths and have great difficulty exhaling.

The mucus from the cough is often greenish in color, signifying infection. The person has wheezing, SOB and as the case worsens, more difficulty

breathing. In advanced stages, oxygen is needed.

Smoking is the cause in at least 80 percent of COPD cases, says Dr. Broudy. He maintains that stopping smoking is necessary and the chief goal of any treatment program. This one act could markedly improve the situation, and/or could slow the progression. Continuing to smoke may lead to marked deterioration of health.

Treatment is directed at limiting the irritation to the bronchi and reducing the destruction of alveoli, mostly by stopping smoking, while concurrently providing appropriate medications for breathing. Second hand smoke must also be eliminated. Management of the disease includes proper nutrition, exercise, and stress reduction tailored to that person's situation. Antibiotic therapy, corticosteroids and bronchodilators may be needed.

About the Author

Jean is an RN who holds an MSN and is a writer. She is staff writer for two sister publications, *Health & Wellness* and *Living Well SOPlus*. Other publications include articles in *Diabetes Health* and *Infinity Magazines* as well as a story in an anthology entitled "Many Roads Taken." She resides in Cincinnati with her cat, Little Bits.



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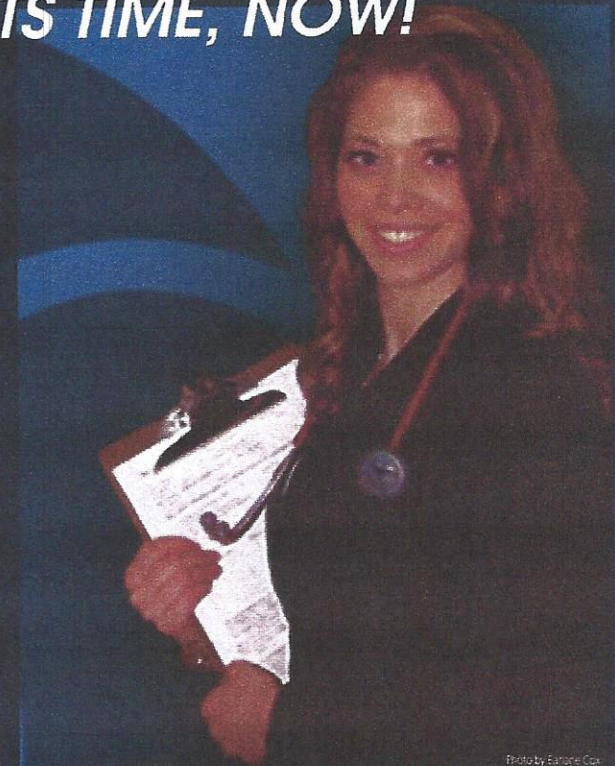


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