

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

Managing COPD Naturally

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) can be debilitating and even deadly. It is currently the sixth leading cause of death worldwide. And, the World Health Organization projects it to be the number four cause of death by 2030. Actually two co-occurring lung diseases — chronic bronchitis and emphysema — COPD narrows airways, causing shortness of breath. Unlike other respiratory conditions like asthma, it is irreversible, progressively making it more and more difficult to breathe.

Fortunately, there are several ways to manage the symptoms of COPD and improve patients' quality of life, including chiropractic care. Dr. Gravesen explores the pitfalls of pharmaceuticals for COPD and describes safer ways to cope with the disorder.

The Challenges of COPD

Smoking is the leading cause of COPD. Since the risk of the disease increases drastically with cumulative tobacco use, COPD is most common in older adults. People with COPD often develop cardiovascular disease, muscle wasting, or osteoporosis, possibly because of the body's systematic inflammatory response.

Patients with COPD also commonly experience depression, anxiety and malnutrition as they suffer the symptoms of COPD. These problems are more likely in older adults whose aging bodies have less vigorous lung function.

The conditions that often come along with COPD make it difficult to manage safely with medication. Medical doctors often prescribe bronchodilators, anticholinergics and corticosteroids to relax muscles around the airways and reduce inflammation. But several adverse effects are associated with these medications. Those administered with an inhaler require precise usage to be effective.

Breathe Easier With Chiropractic

Dr. Gravesen explains that mechanical

problems in the chest and spine are not uncommon, and can increase difficulty in breathing for COPD patients. Research suggests that chiropractic care improves breathing mechanics by improving joint mobility and relaxing the chest wall. This in turn makes exercise easier, further strengthening the lungs (*J Altern Complement Med* 2011;17:797-801).

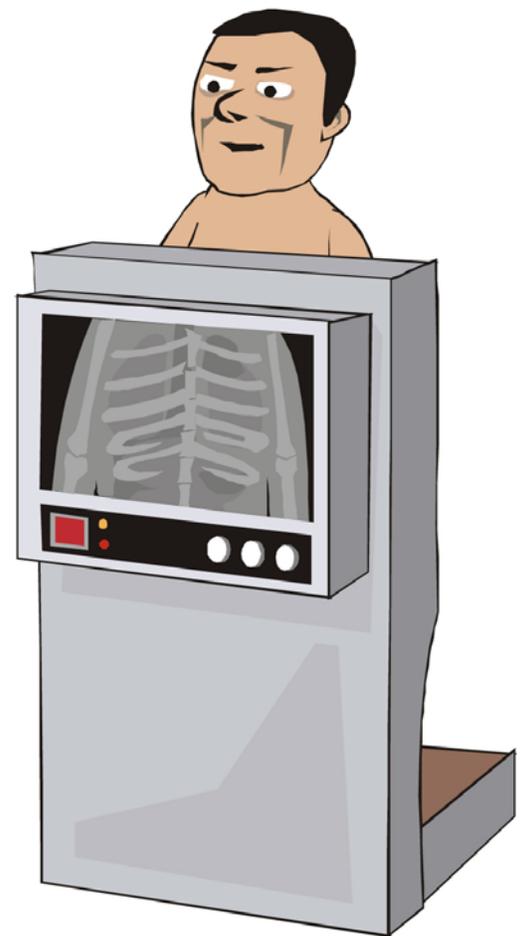
Regular chiropractic care combined with lifestyle modifications may help individuals at risk for COPD to delay or even prevent onset of the disease (*Med Hypotheses* 2009;72:288-90).

Researchers described a case series of six elderly COPD patients (with an average age of 79). Each received 12 sessions of chiropractic care over a period of four weeks. Their lung function was measured before care began, after two weeks and again after four weeks. Four of the six patients showed clinically significant improvement in breathing ability (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2011;34:413-7).

What exactly does chiropractic care involve? Doctors of chiropractic like Dr. Gravesen examine the spine for areas of dysfunction called **vertebral subluxations**. These are quite common and often contribute to muscu-

loskeletal pain as well as a wide range of maladies from allergies and asthma to digestive problems. Chiropractors correct vertebral subluxations by applying gentle, effective maneuvers called **chiropractic adjustments**, which realign the spine and relieve stress on joints, muscles and the nervous system.

Chiropractors also advise patients on nutrition, exercise and other areas of wellness, which allow the body to heal itself and protect against future injury or disease.



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This emphasis on preventive care and wellness is a crucial part of the chiropractic lifestyle. Prevention is particularly relevant to COPD patients, who benefit greatly from health education. Research shows that patient education for COPD sufferers supports their overall wellness and reduces hospital admissions (*Drugs Aging* 2010;27:367-75).

Stop Smoking

The most crucial advice for anyone diagnosed with COPD is to stop smoking. As the most common cause of the disease, continued smoking speeds its progression, and yet many COPD sufferers continue to smoke. Just about every life-long smoker will eventually develop COPD if his or her health is not crushed earlier by lung cancer, cardiovascular disease, or other smoking-related health problems (*Lancet* 2006;367:1216-19).

If you are struggling with quitting smoking, ask the doctor about support groups and other smoking cessation resources in the community.

The Importance of Exercise

Besides kicking the tobacco habit, the

next most challenging change for many COPD patients to make is committing to regular exercise. The difficulty comes from the fact that, while exercise improves lung function, poor lung function makes it hard to maintain breathing during physical activity. However, it's a worthwhile challenge to tackle. Inactivity ups the risk for COPD *co-morbidities* (the conditions listed earlier that often come hand-in-hand with COPD).

One eight-year study looked at the physical activity and survival rates of 226 individuals in Denmark with COPD. Those who reported regular outdoor activity had higher performance status and higher body mass index, plus less need for oxygen therapy. These patients had significantly better survival rates than those without outdoor activity (*Clin Rehabil* 2005;19:331-8).

Eating Right for Lung Health

Investigators are uncovering a strong tie between nutrition and lung health. Antioxidants — including vitamins A, C and E — have emerged as particularly important. Antioxidants prevent the formation of disease-causing free radicals in the body, in turn protecting

the lungs from chronic disease (*Epidemiol Rev* 2001;23:268-87).

One study compared 34 COPD patients with 43 healthy control subjects, all aged 50 years or older. Their nutrient profiles were deciphered via blood testing and a dietary questionnaire. Compared with the control group, COPD patients had lower levels of antioxidant nutrients in their blood, consumed significantly fewer fruits and vegetables, and had more white blood cell DNA damage (*Asia Pac J Clin Nutr* 2010;19:393-401).

A review of other investigations confirms that increased antioxidant intake improves COPD symptoms (*Respir Res* 2010;11:171).

Finally, an overall healthy diet is critical for living well with COPD. Malnutrition is not uncommon in elderly COPD patients as they struggle with physical limitations and the depression and other mental problems triggered by COPD. Low body mass index or BMI increases risk of hospitalization as well as death (*Chron Respir Dis* 2004;1:71-8).

Make an Appointment Today

If you or a loved one is at risk of COPD, or already suffers from it, don't delay. The longer you wait to address the problem, the more severe the disease will manifest. Our chiropractic office is committed to helping patients prevent and ease the symptoms of COPD with all-natural solutions. Call our office today to schedule an appointment.

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