COPD symptoms strike bright and early

Publish Date: 20 November 2013 13:15 CET

While the symptoms of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) can be experienced throughout the day, the morning is often the most difficult time for patients, who find that their routines of showering and getting ready are often significantly slowed down due to COPD symptoms.

COPD, a progressive, life-threatening disease that includes the conditions emphysema and chronic bronchitis, affects 210 million people worldwide and is projected to be the third leading cause of death by 2020. The condition can start negatively impacting the normal daily activities of patients from the minute they wake in the morning.

According to a recent survey of 811 COPD patients conducted by Kantar Health and sponsored by Novartis Pharmaceuticals, normal standard activities like using the stairs and getting up can take as much as 15 minutes longer per activity to complete. Doing anything more strenuous like traveling to work or shopping can take up to 30 minutes longer for each task than it did before symptoms became worse in the morning. “Symptoms in the morning are reported quite frequently among patients with COPD,” says Dr. Anthony D’Urzo, Associate Professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, at the University of Toronto in Canada. “For many patients it has a very significant impact on their ability to do even the smallest tasks like getting dressed or even eating.”

Forty-nine percent of all COPD patients surveyed claimed they change their morning routine due to disease symptoms. Many wake up earlier or avoid stairs. Of the 439 patients who said their routines were affected because of morning symptoms, 33 percent avoid appointments before a certain time and 26 percent refrain from all morning appointments. Many require extra support from a relative, friend or carer as a result of COPD symptoms in the morning.

Interestingly, the COPD patients who were surveyed often see the interference of carrying out activities due to symptoms in the morning as a greater challenge than the symptoms themselves, which can include shortness of breath and coughing up phlegm. Most feel that morning symptoms are eased by treatment, yet less than a quarter believe their treatment helps improve their ability to perform daily responsibilities.

Novartis realizes it is necessary for patients and doctors to communicate with each other, in order to manage COPD symptoms. For a third of 798 patients, getting through morning activities more efficiently was a key treatment goal. However, only 22 percent of those patients said their physicians had discussed how medication might help improve their ability to carry out morning activities.

The study concluded that, in addition to taking medicines, patients often develop coping
strategies like changing their daily schedules to attempt to limit the effects of COPD symptoms in the morning on their everyday lives. Novartis encourages COPD patients to remain active and speak openly to their healthcare professional about their symptoms.


Links