Health & Fitness

Breathing Problems

Early diagnosis important for successful treatment of COPD

By Brandy Nance
nance@emporiagazette.com

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease or COPD is one of the leading causes of death in the United States and it's on the rise. Karen Schell, registered respiratory therapist and director of cardiopulmonary services at Newman Regional Health, said COPD is on the rise compared to the other three killer diseases: stroke, heart disease and cancer.

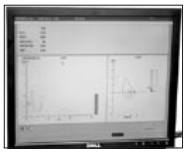
What is COPD?

COPD is a lung disease that includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema. It is often caused by heavy, longtime cigarette smoking, according to information from KRAMES Health and Safety Education. People at risk include those who have smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their entire lifetime.

"COPD can also include chronic asthma, which is hypersensitivity to air passages in the lungs," the informational leaflet stated. "Bronchitis, emphysema and asthma all have one thing in common: they limit the flow of air into and out of your lungs. As a result you may cough, wheeze, have excess mucus and feel short of breath."

With chronic bronchitis, airways are irritated, narrowed and overproduce sticky mucus. Airway walls are swollen and block air from passing through. Mucus also can block airways making it hard to breathe. With emphysema, the walls of the air sacs in the lungs lose their elasticity and air is trapped inside making it hard to breathe.

COPD is generally seen in people beginning in their 60s, Schell said. And with the Baby Boomers (those born after World War II), the number of people with COPD is on a steep rise, Schell said. Schell added that COPD isn't often seen in young people unless it's the type that is inherited. Lung function also can be affected by irritants such as secondhand smoke and fumes from diesel and drywall dust and even paint.



MATT BRISTOW/GAZETTE

This computer graphs the information from the pulmonary function machine at Newman Regional Health.

"You don't think about that when you're at home painting," Schell said. "You need to protect lungs."

Schell said diagnostic tests are done for COPD that show whether the person has decreased lung function. Newman Regional Health has a pulmonary function lab where such tests can be performed. The tests look at lung volume and how much air is expelled out of the lungs when a person blows the air back out.

People with COPD have problems with air staying trapped in the lungs, Schell said. They also may experience decreased ability to cough up trapped mucus.

"If you can't have a good cough and lots of mucus stays in there you get infections," Schell said.

Treatment

COPD can be treated with medications including inhalers, oxygen and pills. There are breathing exercises a person can do to help improve symptoms including pursed-lip breathing and diaphragmatic breathing.

There also are things that can be done to minimize physical stress on someone with COPD such as sitting on a stool to do dishes and resting in between doing household chores.

"We all take the ability to breathe for granted," Schell said. "Even a little bit of activity for people with COPD and these people are down for the count."

Because COPD limits the amount of activity people can do, exercise has to be designed with this in mind. This includes a lot of upper body exercises. A creative way to get exercise is Wii games as well, Schell said.

"They can sit in a chair and do bowling," she said.

People with COPD should also quit smoking or reduce it significantly, Schell said. Other actions should be taken to prevent further breathing troubles including running the air conditioning in the home and in the car to help keep allergens down. The sooner people quit smoking, the better quality of life they will have, Schell said.

Certain foods can help COPD as well and can promote oxygen exchange in the body. A balanced diet of meat and dairy products, fruits and vegetables, bread, cereal, rice and pasta and foods high in potassium are all encouraged.

Get screened

The key is catching COPD and treating it early, Schell said. A national initiative, Drive4COPD has the goal of screening millions of people for COPD and raising awareness of the disease. The initiative was launched in February and helps people recognize the signs of COPD and take action. The screen is a five-question survey that asks about symptoms, age and how much people have smoked in their lifetime.

To take part in the Drive-4COPD, go to drive4copd.com and take the online screening test. The test can be printed out and taken to the doctor.

For more information or to schedule a screening at Newman Regional Health call 343-6800, Ext. 1300 or 1309.

MATT BRISTOW/GAZETTE

Kristi Mendoza, left, registered respiratory therapist in cardiopulmonary services, and Karen Schell, registered respiratory therapist and director of cardiopulmonary services at Newman Regional Health in Emporia, demonstrate how the pulmonary function machine measures lung function for patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

HEALTH AGENDA

Support

THE LOOK GOOD, FEEL BETTER program is a free program from the American Cancer Society designed for women dealing with hair loss and skin changes from chemotherapy and radiation. Women will learn specific techniques to make the most of their appearance while undergoing treatment. Sessions are held at the Emporia Central Care Cancer Center, 1401 W. 12th Ave. To register, call 342-0576.

THE MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SELF HELP GROUP meets at 6:30 p.m. the third Tuesday of each month at the First United Methodist Church, 823 Merchant St. Information: Karen Cope at 340-8080 or cope3c@gmail.com.

THE FIRST PLACE 4 HEALTH ORIENTATION group meetings are from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Wednesday. To make reservations or for more information, call Lori at 342-1967 or e-mail: ldtovar@yahoo.com.

INDIVIDUAL, COUPLE, FAMILY and group counseling is available through the Emporia State University Community Counseling Services at the Earl Center, 1601 State St. Information: 341-5799.

HOPE, A SUPPORT GROUP for those living wtih an acquired brain trauma, i.e., from head injury, trauma or stroke and those who experience similar neurological challenges. Members meet weekly at the Earl Center. Registration is required. Information: ESU Community Counseling Services, 341-5799.

A PARENTING GROUP is available to learn skills that make life with children easier and more satisfying. Members meet weekly at the Earl Center. Registration is required. Call ESU Community Counseling Services, 341-5799.

SUPPORT FOR SMOKERS who want to quit is available day or night from the Kansas Tobacco Quit Line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) aponsored by the Kansas Tobacco Use Prevention Program

"STRONG TOWER," a Christ-centered 12-step recovery group meets at 6 p.m. Monday; 8:30 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday and 7 p.m. Thursday through Sunday at 2910 W. Highway 50, Suite A. Information: 366-1427.

THE FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH widowed persons grief support group meets at 9:30 a.m. every Tuesday in the church library. Information: Ruth Denny-Haig, 342-0037.

THE SOS SUPPORT GROUP for individuals and families who are in abusive relationships or who have experienced an abusive relationship meets every Tuesday. Information: 342-1870 or, outside the Emporia calling area, (800) 825-1295.

PROJECT ABLE, a support group for adult consumers and survivors diagnosed with a severe and persistent mental illness, meets from 3 to 5 p.m. the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at the First United Methodist Church. Information: 340-0697.

THE HOMICIDE SURVIVORS GROUP meets at 5:30 p.m. the third Tuesday of every month at St. Mark's Lutheran Church. Information: 341-3319.

THE EMPORIA ALZHEIMER'S support group meets from 7 to 8 p.m. the third Tuesday of each month in the lounge at the ESU Newman division of nursing (the building east of Newman hospital). This meeting is for caregivers, families and friends of persons with Alzheimer's disease and other dementia diseases. For more information, call Paula Sauder, 342-4939.

THE PARKINSON'S SUPPORT GROUP meets at 1:30 p.m. the third Wednesday of each month at the Emporia Presbyterian Manor. Information: 412-6458.

TALKING BOOKS, visually impaired support group, meets at 1 p.m. the fourth Wednesday of each month at the Emporia Senior Center.

MEND — Mommies Enduring Neonatal Death — is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to reach out to those who have lost a child to miscarriage, stillbirth or infant death. The group meets from 7 to 8:30 p.m. the second Thursday of each month at Cora Miller Hall-Newman Division of Nursing, just east of Newman Regional Health, 1127 Chestnut St., Room 107. Information: Stephanie Metzger, 343-6357 or stephanie@mend.org

Fitness

WEIGHT WATCHERS of Emporia meets every Monday at the Faith Lutheran Church, 1348

Please see **Health, Page 7**

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