Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and Comorbidities

COPD makes breathing difficult and often consists of three conditions: chronic bronchitis, chronic asthma and emphysema. But COPD affects more than the lungs. It can cause health conditions such as weight loss, loss of muscle mass, strength, and malnutrition. Any of these can lead to a higher risk of comorbidities.

Comorbidities are two or more diseases existing at the same time in the body. It is common for people with COPD to develop comorbidity because COPD makes it hard for organs to get enough oxygen, which can prevent them from working properly.

What health conditions can coexist with COPD, and how should they be treated?

- **Heart Disease.** The heart and lungs work together to give organs the oxygen they need to work normally. COPD makes it more difficult for the lungs to collect oxygen and get it to the bloodstream. The heart is forced to work harder to keep the rest of the body properly nourished. This extra stress on the heart puts someone with COPD at a greater risk for heart disease. Exercises in a pulmonary rehabilitation program can help your heart stay healthy.

- **Osteoporosis.** Osteoporosis is a condition that weakens a person’s bones, which puts a person at a greater risk for falls and fractures. Some people living with COPD have other risk factors related to osteoporosis including smoking, low vitamin D levels and use of steroids for treatment. Women with COPD and osteoporosis are at a greater risk for hip fractures. Weight-bearing and strengthening exercises can help to prevent fractures.

- **Diabetes.** Research shows that there might be a connection between diabetes and COPD because both conditions involve inflammation. Some of the medications used to treat COPD may worsen high blood sugar, which results in symptoms of diabetes such as blurry vision, frequent urination, thirst and hunger. Following a healthy diet and getting enough exercise can help to prevent or manage diabetes.

- **Lung infections.** People living with COPD may experience frequent lung infections, such as pneumonia. Quitting smoking and reducing exposure to lung irritants instantly decrease the risk of these types of infections. It is also recommended that all people who have COPD have a pneumonia vaccination as well as an annual flu shot to reduce their risk of infection.

Other conditions that may occur with COPD include:

- Anemia,
- Anxiety
- Cognitive decline
- GERD
- Glaucoma
- Sleep disorders

If you experience any of these conditions or have questions about other symptoms, speak with your healthcare provider about possible prevention and treatment options.