

New Year's Resolutions for People with COPD

Jo-Von Tucker's life as she knew it came to a screeching halt when, at age 52, she was told that she had COPD. Her doctor also told her that she would have to wear oxygen 24-hours a day for the rest of her life, and that she had less than five years to live.

Did she go home and give up? No way! Jo-Von was a fighter and she went on to help herself, and others, by starting a much-needed breathing support group in her town. She also wrote a book and published a newsletter for pulmonary patients and families. In addition, Jo-Von worked with various organizations to improve oxygen delivery and availability. Everything she did, she did with gusto and a no-nonsense Texas / Manhattan style, sometimes bluntly saying, "We just have to get off our duffs and fix this!"

I met Jo-Von for the first time in late 2003 at the first national COPD conference in Arlington, Virginia. Just one month later she passed away unexpectedly from complications following surgery.

I share with you now an editorial she wrote for the 1999 New Year. Her words are just as appropriate today as they were then, and through them her spirit lives on to improve the lives of people with COPD everywhere.

Jane M. Martin

Something to Think About...

by Jo-Von Tucker

The turning of a year brings the traditional New Year's resolutions to most of us. You know the ones... lose weight, drink less alcohol, balance my checkbook consistently, catch up with correspondence, etc. But I got to thinking about my own resolutions; of the fact that many of my choices came about because I have obstructive lung disease, and how they might be helpful to other COPD patients.

It's time to remind ourselves of things we can do to more effectively manage our illness. Steps we can take to help us achieve a higher quality of life. Ways we can take action in order to avoid being victimized by COPD. Things we can do to add sparkle and meaning to our lives.

Here is my suggested list for us all to consider – and to commit ourselves to.

I, hereby resolve, that in this New Year...

1. I will take better care of myself, getting more rest when it is needed.
2. I will allow myself time to feel peaceful and serene, for meditating or just for very personal private time.
3. I will continue to reach out to help others, taking focus away from my own illness.
4. I will be a compliant patient, following my doctor's prescribed treatment plan.
5. I will not neglect my nutritional needs, and will provide my body with the much-needed vitamins, essential minerals and antioxidants that will help with healing and maintaining stability of COPD.
6. I will make the effort to stay socially active, to interact with people around me, and to seek out those I would choose to be with. I will not allow this disease to isolate me.
7. I will follow a regular exercise program to maintain maximum fitness and muscle tone.
8. I will make the time to do things that I love.
9. I will avoid exposure to viruses and other germs wherever possible... but not to the extent of paranoia.
10. I will continue to learn all I can about COPD, making me a better partner with my doctor in managing my illness.
11. On the "bad" days that inevitably will occur, I will remind myself of the many opportunities for fun, sheer joy, blissful contentment and enlightening experiences that, just as surely, will come in the New Year.
12. I will work hard to maintain a positive attitude, which will help in my healing.
13. I will try to not be constantly focused on how I feel, diverting attention instead to my loved ones.
14. I will, however, give myself the chance to talk about COPD within my support group, where we all share the same problems and concerns.

So there you have it, my friends... my set of New Year's Resolutions specially selected to help us deal with a chronic illness like COPD. Maybe they won't all fit your philosophy of life. If that is the case, you can consider this a multiple-choice issue, and choose any or all of the itemized goals for your own use. The important thing is, to make a commitment to get better in any way you can.

It's a tricky balancing act, trying to be realistic and grounded, while at the same time seeking hope and encouragement. We should use the beginning of the New Year to recharge our batteries, to throw off bad habits that may have accumulated, and to help ourselves as much as we can.

Happy New Year to One and All!

