



Speaking from Experience *Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)*

Transcript for chapter 1 of 11: Diagnosis

Chris & Reg, 83: In his late forties, early fifties, Reg was starting to have difficulties in coping really, with various things. Getting sudden attacks of breathlessness, and it's not nice at all when you can't breathe nothing else matters, as we all know.

Roy, 53: The reason I was diagnosed was basically, I was playing softball with my wife and two children – we all play on the same team – and I found that I couldn't run from one base to another without stopping. Actually, on a couple of occasions the game was stopped due to my lack of breath. I then went and visited the local doctor and was referred on and it was found that I had emphysema. That was about three years ago, just before my 50th birthday.

Ruth, 72: I was diagnosed 14 years ago. And at that time I was told that it would probably be about a five year life cycle.

Colette, 45: I was running to work in the morning, and it's about 8.5 km, and progressively over a couple of weeks I went from being able to run a couple of kilometres at a go, because I'm not a great runner, to not being able to run 200 metres. It was really confronting, I was like, obviously I'm just lazier than I thought, it's cold. I kept getting a lot of mini infections and I'd be at the doctor. And, you know, what's wrong, I can't breathe. I feel like someone is sitting, physically pushing on my chest and I can't get any air. It feels like the air is stopping at the top of my lungs. I've got these little infections. And this went on and on and on, through late July, August and September. And then in the October I went to a different doctor who then decided to test for a lung disease, versus everything else.

Julie, 58: We did the lung function test, the whole gamut, which was useful to find out what was this and I was given the diagnosis of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease.

Colette, 45: I was very confused and a little, 'Isn't this an old person's disease?' Does this mean I'm going to stop breathing? Does this mean I'm going to end up like people you see that just die because their airways seal up? I wasn't sure what it was and it was a little confronting and it was quite frightening.

Ruth, 72: I asked what it was and I think I remember thinking, the reality is you've smoked for all those years, you're going to pay the consequences for that.

Roy, 53: My reaction to diagnosis, honestly, was 'What do you expect? You know, shit, but what did you expect? You've been smoking since you were 11. You're hooting down 30 odd a day, or 10,000 a year when I worked it out. What did you expect?'

Ruth, 72: The symptoms were, I couldn't breathe, and I was extremely fearful. If you don't know what that is and all of a sudden you can't breathe, it's very unpleasant and quite terrifying experience. I was actually in the middle of town in Calcutta, where we were going over a bridge and I was with a lot of other work people, a lot of engineers, with a lot of men, we were looking at things and I got that I couldn't breathe at all. They ran down and got the car to come up and take me back to the hotel and the doctor came. And a doctor said,



asthma, and gave me the appropriate medication for asthma. But I knew that when I got back to Australia, I knew that it wasn't just asthma, it certainly was asthma, but it was actually the COPD. You cannot, when it's that bad, you're actually gasping for air.

Graham, 69: When I was starting to get on a bit, I was starting to find it very difficult to climb up a ladder and carry a piece of timber, cut it, or whatever. And it was starting to become frustrating, I was slowing down. So, I asked my doctor, and he said don't worry about it, it's just old age, it's coming. I said, oh. I persevered a bit longer and then I happened to go to the doctor's another day and it was a young lady doctor. I'd never had a young lady doctor before. And she asked me how I felt and I told her, and she said, 'I'm going to send you to the hospital to get some tests done.' So she did. I went and I had the tests done and I had this injection put in my arm and I had to get on the treadmill and then the bike, and so forth, and then go through an MRI. And then the surgeon said, 'It's time for you to retire, you have emphysema.' Shock, horror. How long have I got? How many cigarettes do you smoke a day? 25, 30, whatever. 'Well', he said, 'Keep working, keep smoking and I'll give you four years.' Best kick in the butt I ever had.

Roy, 53: Looking at the x-rays of my lungs showed that what had been done wasn't reversible, and I had to then choose what I was going to do about it.