



Talk with your healthcare provider **BEFORE** you have a flare-up.
Know what you should do.

Your Plan:

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COPD EXACERBATIONS: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW



If you have COPD, you may have a flare-up at some point. “Exacerbation” is the medical term for a COPD flare-up.

Flare-ups result in increased daily symptoms. They can be serious and can:

- Worsen lung function that may not improve
- Worsen your quality of life
- Require hospital stay

It is important for all with COPD to know how to:

- Avoid exacerbations or flare-ups
- Tell when an exacerbation or flare-up is developing
- Know what to do if they suspect an exacerbation or flare-up

This booklet gives answers to common questions about COPD exacerbations, or flare-ups.

WHAT CAUSES COPD FLARE-UPS?

Flare-ups are most likely to occur in severe COPD but can occur even with mild COPD. They are most common in winter months. Causes include:

- Infections caused by viruses and bacteria
- Inadequate medication in treating your COPD
- Poor air quality such as pollution, smoke exposure

WHAT ARE COMMON SIGNS OF FLARE-UPS?

Flare-ups cause COPD symptoms to worsen from what you experience on a daily basis. Some changes that may happen with a flare-up are:

- More quick release inhalers/drugs needed
- More shortness of breath
- More coughing
- Change in sputum color or amount
- Increase in sputum amount
- Wheezing, or chest tightness /heaviness
- Less activity tolerance or stamina
- More fatigue or tiredness
- Confusion
- Fever



HOW DO I TELL IF I AM HAVING A COPD FLARE-UP?

Your health care provider (HCP) can tell if you are having a COPD flare-up or another problem.

- Call or see your HCP as soon as your COPD is worse than usual
- If you cannot reach your HCP, go to an emergency department
- Your HCP will
 - o Ask about your symptoms
 - o Examine you
 - o Decide the cause of your symptoms
 - o Discuss the best treatment for you
 - o Your HCP may order tests, such as:
 - Chest x-ray
 - Oxygen test (oximetry)
 - Lab-work

HOW IS A COPD FLARE-UP TREATED?

A flare-up should be treated as soon as possible. Depending on how bad the flare-up is, you may need:

- Change in your usual medication therapy
- Added medication:
 - o Short-acting bronchodilators
 - o Steroid medicine by mouth
 - o Antibiotics
- Fluids and rest
- Oxygen therapy
- Hospital admission may be needed



HOW CAN COPD FLARE-UPS BE AVOIDED?

Not all flare-ups can be avoided, but it helps to:

- Take medication as prescribed
- Quickly report a change in symptoms
- Get flu and pneumonia vaccine
- Avoid others who are sick
- Practice good hand hygiene
- Avoid cigarette smoke
- Avoid temperature and weather extremes
- Maintain activity as tolerated
- Avoid other triggers such as dust, perfumes, paint fumes, etc.