

When Your COPD Symptoms Get Worse



COPD* is a lung disease that makes it hard to breathe. If you have COPD, you may have times when some of your symptoms get worse. These are called “flare-ups,” or exacerbations (ek-zass-er-bay-shuns).

How can you tell that you are having a flare-up?

- Your cough may get worse
- You may have increased shortness of breath
- You may cough up more mucus, or the mucus may be yellow or green

What should you do if a flare-up occurs?

- Talk to your healthcare professional as soon as your symptoms get worse
- Call 911 or go to the emergency room if your symptoms are very bad

Write down:

- The phone numbers for your healthcare professional, hospital, and other emergency contacts
- A list of all the medicines you take and how much you take of each one
- What you should do if your symptoms get worse

*Chronic (kron-ick) obstructive (ob-struck-tiv) pulmonary (pull-muh-nair-ee) disease, including chronic bronchitis (bronk-eye-tis), emphysema (em-fuh-zee-muh), or both.

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Your healthcare professional can help you reduce your risk of a COPD flare-up. Be sure to talk about your symptoms at your next visit.

It's a good idea to speak to your healthcare professional about writing an *action plan for flare-ups*—a written set of instructions that let you know what to do when your symptoms get worse.

What causes flare-ups? Each person has different causes of flare-ups.

Look over this list of common causes. Have any of these made your symptoms worse?

- Smoking, or being around smoke
- Infections, like colds or the flu
- Strong fumes, like car exhaust or perfume
- Air pollution and smog
- Weather changes
- Very cold or very humid air

Learn which things cause your symptoms to get worse and try to avoid them.

To help reduce flare-ups and keep your COPD under control:

- Do not smoke
- Ask your healthcare professional about getting flu and pneumonia shots
- Try not to sit in traffic or go outdoors during air pollution alerts
- Try to cover your mouth and nose to keep them warm in cold weather
- Stay indoors during hot, humid weather or on days with smog. Stay in an air-conditioned room
- Don't breathe in fumes from perfume, paint, or cleaning products