INFORM Yourself

Symptoms: Keep Track and Know When to Act

Symptoms of COPD vary from person to person and change over time. Keeping track of your symptoms will help both you and your health care provider better understand your condition and what kind of treatment you might need. It can be helpful to keep a log of your symptoms during the days or weeks before you are scheduled to visit your health care provider. Include details about what you were doing when you had the symptoms and how long they lasted. Bring the log to your appointment and share it with your provider. Some symptoms you'll want to make note of include the following:

- Constant coughing
- Wheezing
- Excess mucus production
- Shortness of breath during everyday activities
- Chest tightness
- Feeling like you can’t breathe

When COPD becomes more severe, it can cause other symptoms such as the following:

- Swelling in your feet, ankles, or legs
- Weight loss
- Loss of muscle endurance

You’ll want to make note of those symptoms, too, and be sure to talk about them with your provider. There are some symptoms, however, that are more serious and may require treatment in a hospital. Seek emergency care if any of the following occurs:

- You can’t catch your breath or talk
- Your lips or fingernails turn blue or gray (this is a sign of low blood oxygen levels)
- You feel dizzy, “foggy,” lightheaded, or confused
- Your heart starts beating very fast
- The treatment you usually use for worsening symptoms isn’t working

You can’t completely get rid of the symptoms of COPD. But you can learn to recognize them and know when you need to get help or talk to your provider about treatment options.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
Effects of COPD

Long-term effects

COPD is a chronic disease that progresses over time. It affects your breathing and causes stress to your lungs, heart, and other parts of your body.

Every breath you take has 2 parts: breathing in (inhaling) and breathing out (exhaling). When you inhale, you breathe oxygen into your lungs. Your lungs then transfer that oxygen to your blood. When you exhale, you breathe out carbon dioxide, which your body doesn't need. Because COPD makes breathing difficult, your blood might not be getting enough oxygen when you inhale. You also might not be getting rid of enough carbon dioxide when you exhale. Not enough oxygen combined with too much carbon dioxide puts stress on your lungs and heart.

This stress can lead to complications. For example, the blood vessels inside your lungs (pulmonary arteries) may narrow. This narrowing can cause high blood pressure in your lungs (pulmonary hypertension). This puts a strain on your heart because it has to pump harder to get blood through the narrower blood vessels. This can lead to a condition called cor pulmonale (right-sided heart failure).

Other complications of COPD include the following:
- Lung infections and inflammation (pneumonia, bronchitis)
- Collapsed lungs
- Acute respiratory failure
- Irregular heart beat (arrhythmia)
- Thinning of bones from steroid use
- Weight loss or gain
- Anxiety

Flare-ups

You may also experience something called a flare-up or an “exacerbation.” If any of the symptoms listed in the article on the cover page suddenly get worse, you may be having a flare-up. If this happens, call your health care provider. Your provider may tell you to take medications at home. Or, they may tell you to make an appointment with them or go to the hospital.

COPD cannot be cured. But, you can take the following steps to prevent or delay complications and limit flare-ups—and limit trips to the emergency room, too!
- Quit smoking.
- Stay away from secondhand smoke and other air pollutants.
- Visit your health care provider regularly to talk about any changes in your health. Changes you should talk about include ankle swelling, increased shortness of breath, decreased endurance, weight gain or loss, or anxiety.
- Follow the treatment plan prescribed by your health care provider. This includes taking your medications and exercising and eating as your provider recommends.
- Do breathing exercises.
- Get your flu shot and pneumonia shot as recommended by your health care provider.
- Wash your hands often and ask people who aren’t feeling well to wear a mask.
- Stay away from crowds to avoid airborne germs.

Doing these things can help you breathe easier, stay more active, and avoid or manage severe symptoms.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); COPD Foundation; MedlinePlus; Minnesota Department of Health (MDH); National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
Getting the Most from Your Lungs
COPD is a progressive disease, meaning the symptoms usually get worse slowly over time. This is because the tissues that make up your lungs change and become less and less able to function.

What’s going on in your lungs?
Your body has tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs through your nose and mouth. These are called “airways.” The airways end in air sacs (also called “alveoli”). Healthy airways and air sacs are elastic. They stretch and inflate when you breathe in and then bounce back to their original shape when you breathe out—just like a rubber band or a balloon. This elasticity helps your lungs keep their normal structure and move air quickly in and out.

When you have COPD, your airways and air sacs lose their elasticity and don’t bounce back to their original shape. In addition, your smaller airways (called “bronchioles”) may become swollen and irritated and their lining may thicken. Your lungs may also produce more mucus. This combination of things makes it increasingly hard to get air in and out of your lungs.

What can you do to give your lungs a rest?
Although there is no way to reverse the changes that have already taken place in your lungs, there are things you can do to breathe easier. Try to incorporate as many of the following suggestions into your everyday life as you can. It may help you feel better and give your lungs a much-needed rest.

- If you smoke, QUIT!
- Use your quick-relief inhaler as directed when you feel short of breath.
- Take your long-term medication as directed—don’t skip it even if you are feeling good!
- Do the breathing exercises your health care provider has recommended.
- Do activities slowly—know your limits.
- Take the elevator when you can instead of the stairs.
- Keep things you need often within reach.
- Find ways to make cooking, cleaning, and other chores easier. For example, you could try using a small table or cart with wheels to move things around. Or, you could use a pole or tongs with long handles to reach things in high or low places.
- Ask someone to help you move important things to the first floor of your house so you don’t have to climb stairs as often.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothes. Your clothes and shoes should be easy to get on and off.
- Ask for help with daily tasks when you need it.
- Talk to your health care provider about how to reduce stress. They may be able to suggest relaxation techniques that you can practice on your own.

You may also contact your PrimeWest Health care coordinator or case manager if you need help at home to give your lungs a rest. They may be able to set up services to help.

Sources: MedlinePlus; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Health and wellness or prevention information

Note: The information in this magazine is not professional medical advice. It is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment. Do not ignore your health care provider’s advice or wait to ask for it because of something you read here. Links to other websites are provided as a resource only. PrimeWest Health does not endorse, recommend, or pay for products or services offered by such sites.
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Attention. Si vous avez besoin d’une aide gratuite pour interpréter le présent document, veuillez appeler au numéro ci-dessus.

Thov ua twb zoo nyeem. Yog hais tias koj xav tau kev pab txhais lus rau tsab ntaub ntawv no pub dawb, ces hu rau tus najnpawb xov tooj saum toj no.

알려드립니다. 이 문서에 대한 이해를 돕기 위해 무료로 제공되는 도움을 받으시려면 위의 전화번호로 연락하십시오.

Примечание: если вам нужна бесплатная помощь в устном переводе данного документа, позвоните по указанному выше телефону.

Atención. Si desea recibir asistencia gratuita para interpretar este documento, llame al número indicado arriba.

Chú ý. Nếu quý vị cần được giúp đỡ dịch tài liệu này miễn phí, xin gọi số bên trên.
Civil Rights Notice

Discrimination is against the law. PrimeWest Health does not discriminate on the basis of any of the following:

- race
- color
- national origin
- creed
- religion
- sexual orientation
- public assistance status
- age
- disability (including physical or mental impairment)
- sex (including sex stereotypes and gender identity)
- marital status
- political beliefs
- medical condition
- health status
- receipt of health care services
- claims experience
- medical history
- genetic information

Auxiliary Aids and Services: PrimeWest Health provides auxiliary aids and services, like qualified interpreters or information in accessible formats, free of charge and in a timely manner to ensure an equal opportunity to participate in our health care programs. Contact PrimeWest Health at memberservices@primewest.org, or call Member Services at 1-866-431-0801 (toll free) or TTY 1-800-627-3529 or 711.

Language Assistance Services: PrimeWest Health provides translated documents and spoken language interpreting, free of charge and in a timely manner, when language assistance services are necessary to ensure limited English speakers have meaningful access to our information and services. Contact PrimeWest Health at memberservices@primewest.org, or call Member Services at 1-866-431-0801 (toll free) or TTY 1-800-627-3529 or 711.

Civil Rights Complaints

You have the right to file a discrimination complaint if you believe you were treated in a discriminatory way by PrimeWest Health. You may contact any of the following four agencies directly to file a discrimination complaint.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office for Civil Rights (OCR)
You have the right to file a complaint with the OCR, a federal agency, if you believe you have been discriminated against because of any of the following:

- race
- color
- national origin
- age
- disability
- sex
- religion (in some cases)
Contact the **OCR** directly to file a complaint:

Director  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office for Civil Rights  
200 Independence Avenue SW  
Room 515F  
HHH Building  
Washington, DC 20201  
Customer Response Center: Toll-free: 800-368-1019  
TDD 800-537-7697  
Email: ocrmail@hhs.gov

**Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR)**

In Minnesota, you have the right to file a complaint with the MDHR if you believe you have been discriminated against because of any of the following:

- race  
- color  
- national origin  
- religion  
- creed  
- sex  
- sexual orientation  
- marital status  
- public assistance status  
- disability

Contact the **MDHR** directly to file a complaint:

Minnesota Department of Human Rights  
540 Fairview Avenue North  
Suite 201  
St. Paul, MN 55104  
651-539-1100 (voice)  
800-657-3704 (toll free)  
711 or 800-627-3529 (MN Relay)  
651-296-9042 (fax)  
Info.MDHR@state.mn.us (email)

**Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)**

You have the right to file a complaint with DHS if you believe you have been discriminated against in our health care programs because of any of the following:

- race  
- color  
- national origin  
- creed  
- religion  
- sexual orientation  
- public assistance status  
- age  
- disability (including physical or mental impairment)  
- sex (including sex stereotypes and gender identity)  
- marital status  
- political beliefs  
- medical condition  
- health status  
- receipt of health care services  
- claims experience  
- medical history  
- genetic information

Complaints must be in writing and filed within 180 days of the date you discovered the alleged discrimination. The complaint must contain your name and address and describe the discrimination you are complaining about. After we get your complaint, we will review it and notify you in writing about whether we have authority to investigate. If we do, we will investigate the complaint.
DHS will notify you in writing of the investigation’s outcome. You have the right to appeal the outcome if you disagree with the decision. To appeal, you must send a written request to have DHS review the investigation outcome. Be brief and state why you disagree with the decision. Include additional information you think is important.

If you file a complaint in this way, the people who work for the agency named in the complaint cannot retaliate against you. This means they cannot punish you in any way for filing a complaint. Filing a complaint in this way does not stop you from seeking out other legal or administrative actions.

Contact DHS directly to file a discrimination complaint:
Civil Rights Coordinator
Minnesota Department of Human Services
Equal Opportunity and Access Division
P.O. Box 64997
St. Paul, MN 55164-0997
651-431-3040 (voice) or use your preferred relay service

PrimeWest Health Complaint Notice
You have the right to file a complaint with PrimeWest Health if you believe you have been discriminated against because of any of the following:
- medical condition
- health status
- receipt of health care services
- claims experience
- medical history
- genetic information
- disability (including mental or physical impairment)
- marital status
- age
- sex (including sex stereotypes and gender identity)
- sexual orientation
- national origin
- race
- color
- religion
- creed
- public assistance status
- political beliefs

You can file a complaint and ask for help in filing a complaint in person or by mail, phone, fax, or email at:
Rebecca Fuller
Civil Rights Coordinator
PrimeWest Health
3905 Dakota St
Alexandria, MN 56308
Toll Free: 1-866-431-0801
TTY: 1-800-627-3529 or 711
Fax: 1-320-762-8750
Email: rebecca.fuller@primewest.org

American Indian Health Statement
American Indians can continue or begin to use tribal and Indian Health Services (IHS) clinics. We will not require prior approval or impose any conditions for you to get services at these clinics. For elders age 65 years and older this includes Elderly Waiver (EW) services accessed through the tribe. If a doctor or other provider in a tribal or IHS clinic refers you to a provider in our network, we will not require you to see your primary care provider prior to the referral.