



INFORM Yourself

CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD)

You Did It!

Congratulations on completing the Focused Wellness program! This issue of *Inform Yourself* is meant to remind you of what you learned. You can draw on this information to help you stay on top of your health. You can also share the information with others. Having people around who understand your condition and how to support you can be a big help.



Fast Facts About COPD

During your time in the Focused Wellness program, you learned about Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and how to manage it. Here are a few quick reminders about the basics:

- COPD is a group of lung diseases that block airflow and make it hard to breathe. COPD includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis.
- COPD is a progressive disease, which means it gets worse over time. To determine how severe your COPD is, your health care provider might assign it a "stage." One method for doing this was developed by the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD) and is called the GOLD System. It puts cases of COPD into 4 stages of increasing severity.
 - Stage 1: Very mild. You might not be aware you have COPD.
 - Stage 2: Moderate
 - Stage 3: Severe
 - Stage 4: Very severe. Your quality of life is greatly affected.
- You can slow the damage to your lungs by doing a few different things.
 - **Quit smoking.** If you don't smoke, certainly don't start!
 - **Exercise.** Talk to your health care provider about what level of activity is right for you.
 - **Eat right.** Being overweight can make breathing harder. But, you don't want to be underweight, either. Talk to your provider about an eating plan that will help you get to and stay at a healthy weight.
 - **Visit your health care provider.** Go to all your appointments. Talk about techniques that may help you breathe better. Also ask about controlled coughing, which can help clear mucus from your airways.



Remember, there may not be a cure for COPD, but treatment and changes in lifestyle can help you manage your COPD and feel better.

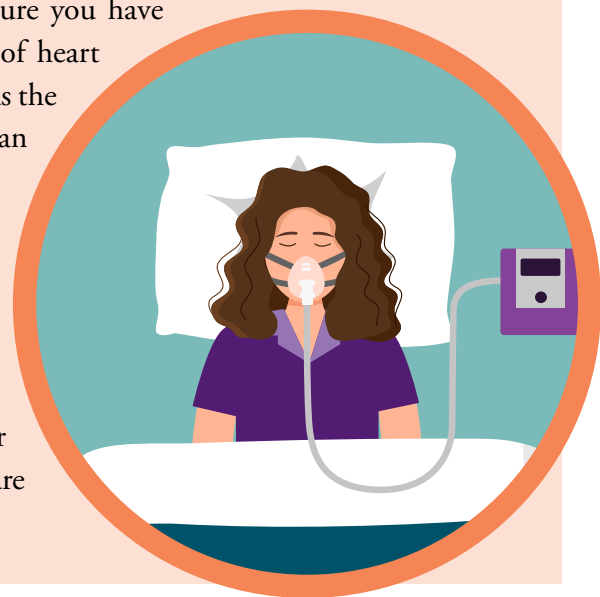
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), GOLD, Lung Institute, Mayo Clinic

Try Not to Complicate Your COPD

People with COPD are at risk for health complications. No matter how careful you are, you can't prevent everything. However, there are some things you can do to help avoid complications of COPD. If you smoke, one key thing you can do is to *stop smoking*. Smoking causes additional damage to your lungs and airways and can lead to complications like a collapsed lung—and you don't want *that*!

You can also take steps to avoid the following complications:

- **Pneumonia, COVID-19, and the flu** – Pneumonia can weaken your lungs and lead to other health problems. There is a vaccine that can help protect against pneumonia. There are also vaccines that help protect against COVID-19 and the flu. Each vaccine is important, especially because many people develop pneumonia after having the flu or COVID-19. Talk to your health care provider about these vaccines. If your provider recommends getting them—get them! You can also protect yourself by washing your hands and avoiding contact with people who are sick.
- **Heart failure and pulmonary hypertension** (high blood pressure in the arteries in your lungs) – Because COPD makes it hard to breathe, people with COPD have lower levels of oxygen in their bloodstream. This can lead to heart failure. To prevent this, you can work to control the progression of COPD. One specific thing that may help is mild to moderate physical activity. Always talk to your health care provider before you start exercising to find out what is best for you. Also make sure you have talked with your provider about how to recognize the symptoms of heart failure. Because many of the symptoms of heart failure are the same as the symptoms of COPD, you need to know what to look for so you can get treatment as soon as possible.
- **Sleep problems** – If it's hard to breathe, it's hard to get a good night's sleep. To ease your breathing, make sure to take medications as prescribed and do any breathing exercises you were instructed to do. A BiPAP machine may help with your breathing. This machine helps keep your airway open by delivering a variable amount of air pressure through a face mask. Sleep disorders can be serious, so be sure to talk with your health care provider about problems you have.



Another way to prevent complications is to follow your treatment plan. If you have a plan, make sure you work with your provider to keep it updated and maintain your progress. If you don't have one, talk to your provider about making one. Finally, be sure to keep all medical appointments and keep an open line of communication with your provider.

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Sources: American Heart Association, Healthline Media

Choose **Your Room, Not the Emergency Room or a Hospital Room**

Nobody wants to end up in the emergency room (ER) or the hospital. Unfortunately, people with COPD can sometimes find themselves there. This often happens when the symptoms and severity of your COPD increase. This is called an “exacerbation” or a “flare-up.” Preventing these and getting early treatment if they do occur is a key part of avoiding hospitalization. That is why it is important to follow your treatment plan. Your treatment plan likely includes getting vaccinations for things like pneumonia, the flu, and COVID-19, as well as taking medication as prescribed.

An Action Plan Can Help

It is also a good idea to develop and maintain an action plan with your provider. Having an action plan can help you monitor your symptoms on a day-to-day basis. This makes it easier to recognize when your symptoms change. When you notice and report symptoms early, you are less likely to have to go to the ER or hospital for treatment. If you don't have an action plan, you can find one to fill out with your provider on our website. Go to www.primewest.org/copd and click on *COPD Action Plan*.



Know the Signs of a Flare-Up

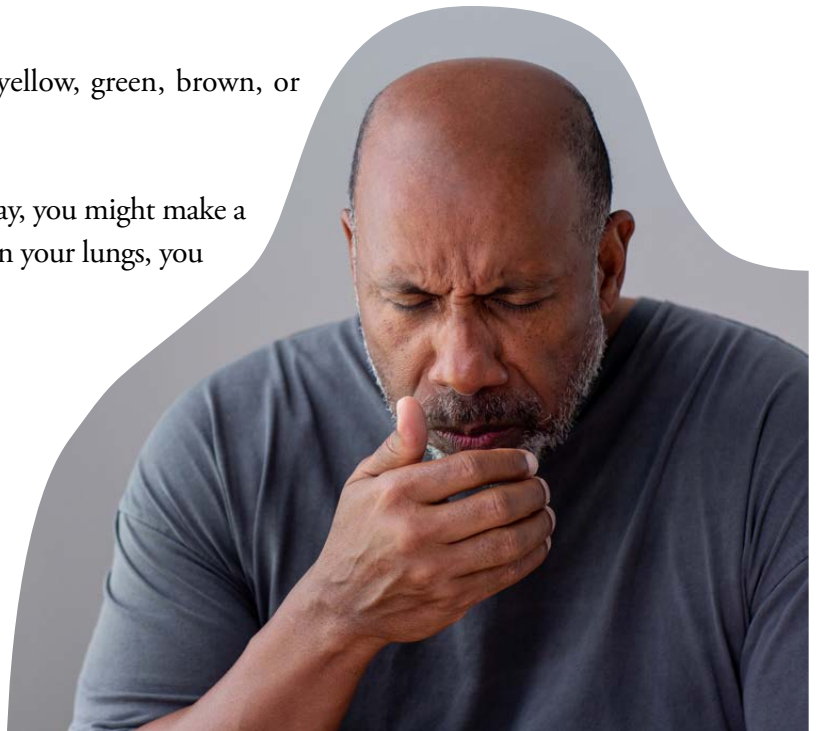
When your COPD symptoms get worse or “flare up,” it's important to take notice and take action. The earlier you can recognize symptoms of a flare-up, the earlier you can get treatment and the more likely you are to avoid complications.

Signs of a COPD flare-up include the following:

- Shortness of breath or increased shortness of breath. You may be so short of breath that you have trouble talking.
- Changes in phlegm (the mucus from your lungs). You may produce:
 - More or less phlegm than usual
 - Thicker phlegm than usual
 - Different color phlegm than usual. It may be yellow, green, brown, or bloody.
- Coughing more than usual
- Noisy breathing. When phlegm is blocking your airway, you might make a wheezing sound when you breathe. If you have fluid in your lungs, you might make a gurgling or rattling noise.
- Blue or gray color around your fingernails or lips
- Difficulty sleeping
- Swollen ankles or legs
- Morning headaches
- Confusion

If you notice these symptoms, follow your COPD action plan (information above) and call your health care provider. If it is an emergency, call **911**.

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Sources: Everyday Health, Healthline Media, MedlinePlus, WebMD



The earlier you can recognize flare-up symptoms, the earlier you can get treatment.



Care Coordination and Case Management: We're Here for You

PrimeWest Health provides Care Coordination and Case Management programs to help keep members healthy. These programs let us work with you and your health care providers to make sure you get the services you need. Your care coordinator/case manager can do the following:

- Help you when you have questions about your health care or prescriptions
- Schedule medical appointments as needed
- Promote good health practices that may prevent problems
- Help arrange services you need to stay safe and healthy at home

PrimeWest Health encourages you to take advantage of these programs. Let your care coordinator or case manager know when and how you need help getting the care and services you need. If you do not know who your care coordinator or case manager is, call Member Services at **1-866-431-0801** and ask to speak with the Focused Wellness nurse. TTY users call **1-800-627-3529** or **711**. These calls are free.

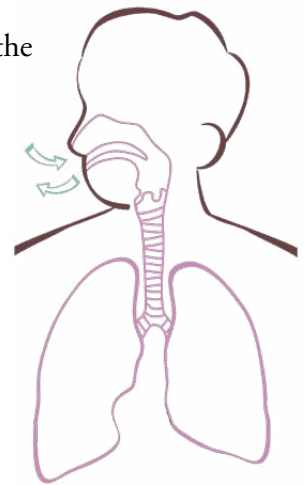
Reduce Shortness of Breath

Difficulty breathing (called “dyspnea”) is a main symptom of COPD. The bad news is that breathing difficulties increase as your COPD progresses. The good news is that there *are* things that you can do to minimize shortness of breath. These strategies include taking your medications and treatments as prescribed. Treatments may include oxygen use, neuromuscular electrical stimulation, and chest wall vibration.

You can also try “pursed lip” breathing. To do this, inhale through your nose and exhale through pursed lips (hold your lips like you are going to whistle or blow out a candle). Your exhale should typically last twice as long as your inhale. So, if you inhale for 2 seconds, exhale for 4.

Additional things to do include the following:

- Elevate your upper body (sit in a chair or prop yourself up with pillows)
- Sleep with one or two pillows under your upper body and head
- Avoid unnecessary exertion (like climbing stairs) until you feel better



If you have any of the symptoms described, follow your action plan and talk to your health care provider as soon as possible.

Source: Canadian Respiratory Journal



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.

1-866-431-0801 (toll free); TTY 1-800-627-3529 or 711

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