Welcome to PrimeWest Health’s Focused Wellness program for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). This program will help you learn more about how to manage your COPD.

COPD is a group of lung diseases that block airflow and make it hard to breathe. COPD includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis and it is typically caused by smoking. Other risk factors for developing COPD include long-term exposure to air pollutants and chemical fumes. Genetics can also play a role.

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.
- **See 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.

There is no 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

**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. This likely includes getting vaccinations for things like pneumonia and the flu. It also includes taking medication as prescribed.

It is also a good idea to develop 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. You can find a sample COPD action plan to fill out with your provider on our website. Go to [www.primewest.org/copd](http://www.primewest.org/copd) and click on **COPD Action Plan**. To learn more about recognizing symptoms of a flare-up, see page 3.
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 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 is also a vaccine to help protect against the flu. The flu vaccine is important because many people develop pneumonia after having the flu. Talk to your health care provider about both of these vaccines. If your provider recommends getting them—get them! You can also protect yourself from pneumonia and the flu 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 outcome, you can work to control the progression of COPD. One specific thing that may help is mild to moderate physical activity. Talk to your health care provider before you start exercising to see what is best for you. Also talk 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 will need to learn 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 the treatment plan your provider develops. Keep all medical appointments, and keep an open line of communication with your provider.

**Sources:** American Heart Association, Healthline Media
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 (see page 1) and call your health care provider. If it is an emergency, call 911.

Sources: Everyday Health, Healthline Media, MedlinePlus, WebMD

Learn How to 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 in the article above, follow your action plan and talk to your health care provider.

Source: Canadian Respiratory Journal
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.
Attention. If you need free help interpreting this document, call the above number.
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.