What Is COPD?

COPD is a chronic disease that makes it hard to empty the air out of your lungs. The main cause is long-term exposure to things that irritate your lungs (irritants). The most common irritant is smoke, but pollution, chemicals, and even dust can contribute.

Many people don't know they have COPD at first. In the beginning, symptoms are mild and hard to notice. As the disease progresses, symptoms include shortness of breath, wheezing, chest tightness, a productive cough (a cough that brings up mucus), weakness, fatigue, and lung infections. These may get worse over time.

If you have COPD, visit your provider regularly. COPD isn't curable, but your provider can develop a treatment plan to help manage it along with any other health conditions you have. This is important because your overall health affects your ability to cope with COPD.

Tips for Living with COPD

Living with COPD can be hard. Following these suggestions can help you manage your symptoms, which can make things a little bit easier. Ask your provider for additional tips.

- Quit smoking.
- Avoid irritants like secondhand smoke, chemicals, dust, and pollution.
- Pace yourself and plan breaks during periods of activity.
- Ask for help with tasks that take a lot of energy.
- Keep frequently used objects in easy-to-reach places.
- Make a list of all your medications and the names and phone numbers of your providers, the hospital, and family or friends who can help you.
- Keep this list handy or program the numbers into your phone.
- Fill your prescriptions before you run out of medication.
- Follow up regularly with your provider. Have your symptoms evaluated and talk about how well your treatment plan is working.
- Address emotional health needs with your provider or mental health care provider (read the article on page 2).
- Call your provider right away if you feel ill, have a fever, or feel your treatment plan is not working for you.
- Go to the emergency room or call 911 if your symptoms become severe.

Source: MedlinePlus

People with chronic conditions may be at higher risk for COVID-19 and be more likely to get very sick. Talk to your provider about staying healthy and getting vaccinated. You can also find resources at www.primewest.org.

Caregiving

Do you provide care for someone with COPD? If you do, it’s important not to forget about your health. Visit your provider regularly and let them know you are a caregiver for someone with COPD. It may be hard to think about your needs when you are concerned about someone else. But, staying healthy is the best way to make sure you are able to provide care. It's also important to be supported in your role as a caregiver. Health care providers, social workers, and case managers or care coordinators can give you information about available resources.

If the person you care for agrees to it, you can help keep track of medications and go to appointments together. One of the best things you can do to support the person you care for is to educate yourself about COPD. The American Lung Association’s website is a good source of information on lung health. You can find it at www.lung.org.

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COPD and Depression

Your physical and emotional health affect each other. For example, breathing difficulties are scary and stressful. Feeling this way can, in turn, make you breathe faster and feel even more short of breath. And, some people with COPD can’t do the things they used to or do things as quickly anymore. These physical changes can cause feelings of anger and sadness.

This interaction between your body and your mind can create a cycle that is hard to break. It’s normal to feel anxious, sad, or angry about the changes that come with COPD. But, if these feelings last, it may be time to seek help for depression. Common symptoms of depression include the following:

- Increased irritability or feelings of indifference
- Loss of interest or pleasure in normal activities
- Change in appetite, with or without change in weight
- Increased tiredness and lack of energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feelings of hopelessness or thoughts of suicide

Talk to your provider if you experience any of these symptoms regularly or if they last longer than 2 weeks. Your provider can help you develop a treatment plan that addresses both the physical and emotional effects of COPD.

Medication Matters

Many medications can be used to help manage COPD. Rescue or quick relief inhalers can open airways quickly. Steroids, bronchodilators, and other medications can help improve symptoms. They can also prevent flare-ups. Antibiotics are given for lung infections. In severe cases of COPD or when symptoms flare up, IV medications, oxygen therapy, or nebulized medications may be used.

No matter what you take, take it as directed by your provider. Not taking it can lead to flare-ups. It can also make symptoms worse. Taking medications more often than you should can cause severe injury or illness.

If you don’t understand how to take your medication, ask your provider. Also tell them if you don’t feel your medications are working the way they should.

Infection Prevention

If you have COPD, you may have frequent lung infections. And, because you have COPD, these infections can be very serious. Some things you can do to prevent lung infections are listed below. Talk with your health care provider about which are right for you. They may have other suggestions, too.

Keep yourself healthy and prevent infections

- Talk with your provider about getting a pneumococcal vaccine. Also be sure to ask about getting a flu vaccine each fall.
- Try to avoid large crowds, especially during flu season, which can last until May.
- Wash your hands frequently with warm water and soap. Use hand sanitizer if you can’t find a place to wash your hands.
- Ask friends and family to reschedule visits if they are ill.

One source of infection you may not have thought about is your mouth. Germs in your mouth can cause infections, so brushing your teeth and seeing your dentist regularly is important.

Source: American Lung Association
Planning with Your Provider

It’s a good idea to visit your health care provider regularly for ongoing evaluation, treatment, and follow-up. Your provider may order a pulmonary (lung) function test (called “spirometry testing”). This test lets your provider know how your COPD is progressing. It also tells how well your medications are working. Your provider might refer you to a pulmonologist if needed. This is a provider who specializes in treating lung diseases.

Your provider can also work with you to develop a treatment plan and an action plan to address your symptoms. You can find a sample action plan on the PrimeWest Health website. Go to www.primewest.org/copd and click on COPD Action Plan.

Action plans and treatment plans can include what to do if your symptoms get worse and when to call your provider or seek medical care. Taking an active role in making your plans lets you provide input and ask questions.

“Your treatment plan helps you know what to do when you experience shortness of breath, changes in sputum (mucus), or breathing difficulties. When you know what to do, you can get needed medical attention earlier. An effective treatment plan helps control your symptoms and may help prevent COPD from getting worse. This will allow you to do things like play with your children or grandchildren, travel, and hopefully avoid a visit to the emergency room.”

Susan Paulson, MD, PrimeWest Health Chief Senior Medical Director

Eat Well, Breathe Better

The way you eat can affect your COPD. Your body uses different amounts of energy to process different foods. Carbohydrates (like bread or pasta and foods high in starch and sugar) take the most energy for your body to process. So, a diet with fewer carbohydrates can make breathing easier. Don’t get rid of all carbohydrates, but talk with your health care provider about reducing them.

Your provider may suggest you meet with a licensed dietitian or nutritionist who can help you determine what kinds and amounts of food you should eat to maintain, gain, or lose weight.

The following are additional tips from the American Lung Association:

• Rest just before eating.
• Eat more food early in the morning if you’re too tired to eat later in the day.
• Avoid foods that cause gas or bloating. They tend to make breathing more difficult.
• Eat 4 to 6 small meals a day. This enables your diaphragm to move freely and lets your lungs fill with air and empty out more easily.
• If drinking liquids with meals makes you feel too full to eat, limit liquids with meals; drink an hour after meals.
• Consider adding a nutritional supplement at night time to avoid feeling full during the day.


Quitting Smoking: YOU Can Do It!

Smoking can trigger flare-ups, damage your lungs, and make it hard to breathe. It also causes COPD to progress faster. This is why, if you smoke, quitting is one of the most important things you can do. It’s also one of the hardest. It usually takes more than just willpower. Your health care provider can help. They can connect you with services and write prescriptions for medications and products that can help you quit. You can also visit www.smokefree.gov to find tools and tips, talk or chat with an expert, and build a quit plan. Quitting isn’t easy. But if you make a commitment, get support, and keep trying, you can do it!

Source: MedlinePlus
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.

Mلاحظة: إذا أردت مساعدة مجانية لترجمة هذه الوثيقة، اتصل على الرقم أعلاه.

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

โปรดทราบ. ท่านสามารถขอความช่วยเหลือในภาษาเก่าและภาษามีนี, จึง
ให้ใช้ที่ช่วยเหลือในที่นี้.

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

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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

You have the right to file a discrimination complaint if you believe you were treated in a discriminatory way by PrimeWest Health. You can file a complaint and ask for help 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

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 or TTY 1-800-627-3529 or 711. The call is free.

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 or TTY 1-800-627-3529 or 711. The call is free.

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 also contact any of the following 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:
Office for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Midwest Region
233 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 240
Chicago, IL 60601
Customer Response Center: Toll-free: 800-368-1019
TDD Toll-free: 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 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
- religion (in some cases)
- age
- disability (including physical or mental impairment)
- sex (including sex stereotypes and gender identity)
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. 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 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

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.