

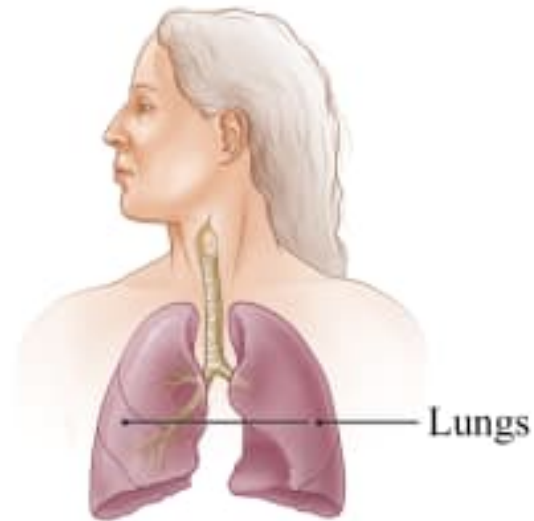
COPD: Exacerbations

Overview

At times, your COPD symptoms may get worse over a short time and stay bad. This is called an exacerbation (say "egg-ZASS-er-BAY-shun") or flare-up.

A lung infection or air pollution could set off an exacerbation. Sometimes it can happen after being around chemicals. You may not always know the cause.

Work with your doctor to make a plan for dealing with an exacerbation. If you are prepared, you may be able to get it under control.



What are the warning signs?

Symptoms of a flare-up include:

- More shortness of breath than usual.
- Coughing more than usual.
- A change in the amount, color, or thickness of mucus.

What should you do if you have a COPD exacerbation?

Do not panic if you start to have a COPD flare-up. If you have a COPD action plan, follow the plan. In general:

- Use your quick-relief inhaler as directed by your doctor. If your symptoms do not get better after you use your medicine, call your doctor or seek immediate medical care. Call an ambulance if needed.
- Use your inhaler or nebulizer correctly. Ask your doctor, pharmacist, or respiratory therapist how to use each of your inhalers or nebulizers.

- If your doctor has given you other inhaled medicines or steroid pills, take them as directed.
- Use a breathing technique, such as pursed-lip breathing. This may help you breathe easier during an exacerbation.
- If your doctor has given you a prescription for an antibiotic, fill it if you need to.
- Call your doctor if you have to use your antibiotic or steroid pills.

How is it treated?

Treatment of a COPD flare-up, or attack, depends on how bad the flare-up is. Mild flare-ups may be treated by following your doctor's instructions for using a quick-relief (short-acting) inhaler or oral steroid medicines. More severe flare-ups may involve visits to your doctor's office or clinic. Or you may need to be treated in the hospital. Treatments include:

- Quick-relief inhaled bronchodilators. These medicines relax the bronchial tubes and make it easier to breathe.
- Oral steroid medicines. They help your lungs work better and help you get better faster.
- Oxygen, to increase the amount of oxygen in your blood.
- A machine to help you breathe better or to breathe for you. These are called ventilation machines.

Treatment may also include:

- Intravenous (I.V.) fluids to treat dehydration.
- Other bronchodilators.
- Antibiotics. Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics to help treat a bacterial infection.



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