

COPD: Identifying Your Triggers

Overview

If you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), your symptoms may get worse over a short time and stay bad. This is called a COPD exacerbation (say "ig-ZAS-ur-BAYshun") or flare-up. Many irritants or triggers can cause an exacerbation.

It is important to understand the triggers so you can try to avoid them. This can help you to keep your symptoms under control and have a better quality of life.

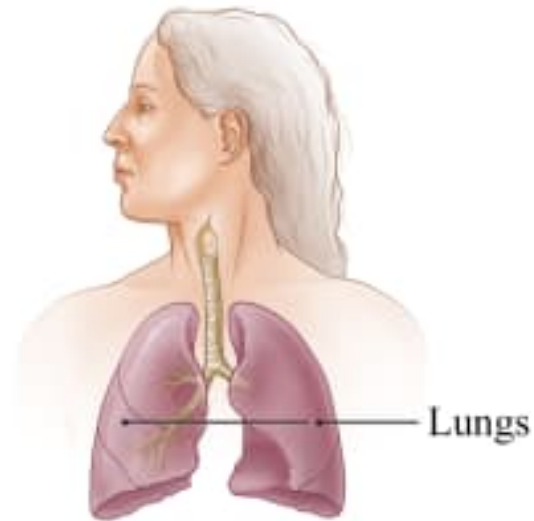
What are common COPD triggers?

Triggers include:

- Illnesses like COVID-19, colds, the flu, or pneumonia.
- Tobacco smoke or air pollution.
- Factory dust or soot.
- Fumes from cleaning supplies or other chemicals.
- Smoke and fumes from woodstoves or kerosene home heaters.
- Things you are allergic to, such as pollen, mold, dust mites, or pet hair.

How can you avoid triggers?

- Take steps to prevent an infection such as COVID-19, a cold, and the flu. When people with COPD get sick, it may turn into something more serious, like pneumonia.
 - Wash your hands often. You may want to also wear a mask when you go to public indoor places. Try to avoid sick people.



- Stay up to date on vaccines. This includes getting a flu vaccine every year.
- Encourage those you live with to also stay up to date on vaccines. Then they can avoid getting sick and infecting you.
- If you smoke, try to quit. If you can't quit, cut back as much as you can. It is never too late to stop smoking. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.
- Try to avoid outdoor lung irritants such as air pollution.
 - Try to stay inside with your windows closed when air pollution is bad.

- Use fans or air-conditioning in hot weather if you can. Then you may not have to open windows.
- Try to keep indoor air clean.
 - Use an air conditioner or air purifier with a special air (HEPA) filter.
 - Try to choose unscented and non-aerosol products. Consider using safer cleaners such as soap and water or baking soda.
 - Make sure fireplaces and woodstoves have tight-fitting doors. Check flues and chimneys for cracks that could allow fumes into your home.
 - Make sure woodstoves and gas ranges are vented well. And turn on your kitchen fan when you cook.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You have severe trouble breathing.
- You have severe chest pain.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have new or worse shortness of breath.
- You have new or worse chest pain.
- You cough up blood.
- You have a fever.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You are coughing more deeply or more often, especially if you notice more mucus or a change in the color of your mucus.
- You have new or increased swelling in your legs or belly.
- You have feelings of anxiety or depression.
- You need to use your antibiotic or steroid pills.
- You are not getting better as expected.