

# Managing Your COPD

## COPD

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a term that is used for two diseases that cause breathing problems: chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

COPD has no cure and gets worse with time. The first signs are a mild shortness of breath and coughing. The cough gradually occurs more often and has a clear, colorless sputum. The cough becomes worse and you need more effort to get air in and out of your lungs.

At the more advanced stage of COPD, your heart may become affected.

COPD doesn't mean you can't still enjoy your everyday life. By taking good care of yourself and remembering a few rules, you can still lead an active life.

## COPD Medicines

There are many medicines used to treat COPD. It is important to know what they do, their side effects and how to take them.

Together, you and your health care provider will decide which are best for you:

❑ **beta2-agonists.** These open your airway quickly. They improve breathing and allow you to exercise.

There is a short-acting medicine and a long-acting medicine.

❑ **anticholinergics.** These open your airway quickly and help reduce your cough.

- ❑ **combination medicines.** These open your airway and reduce swelling.
- ❑ **inhaled steroids.** These reduce swelling in your lungs. Using an inhaler (nebulizer) is the fastest way to get medicine into your lungs.
- ❑ **oxygen.** This will help you feel better. It will help your heart work easier and let you rest better.

It is a good idea to plan how you will always have the right kind of medicine available when you need it.

If you have your medicines in inhalers, be sure you know how to use them to get the most medicine into your lungs.

## Other Ways to Manage COPD

- **Do not smoke.** The best thing you can do for your health is to not smoke. If you do smoke, quitting isn't easy but you can succeed.
- If you need help quitting, talk with your doctor, visit [smokefree.gov](http://smokefree.gov), or call the tobacco intervention program at:
  - Abbott Northwestern Hospital (612-863-1648)
  - Mercy Hospital (763-236-8008)
  - River Falls Area Hospital (715-307-6075).

*(over)*

- **Prevent infection.** Protect your lungs by preventing infection.
  - **Get vaccines (shots).** The flu shot is needed every year. The pneumonia shot is needed once every year until age 65.
  - **Wash your hands often.** This is especially true after contact with people in public places. Try to avoid large crowds and anyone who is sick.
  - **Eat healthful foods.** Eat fruits and vegetables every day. Eat 5 or 6 smaller meals during the day. Try soft foods to help save energy.
  - **Drink lots of water.** You may also drink beverages that are not fizzy or that have caffeine.
  - **Get plenty of rest.**
- **Exercising.** Exercise can help you manage your COPD. Even a small amount of exercise can improve your health and lead to fewer hospital stays.

If you are not used to regular exercise, talk with your health care provider about what is best for you.

- **Save your energy.** Without even knowing it, you may be wasting energy every day. Finding easier ways to do things will give you more energy to do the things you enjoy.

Plan ahead, pace yourself and make priorities. Remember, your health comes first.

- **Losing weight if you are overweight.** Being overweight can make breathing harder. It can also affect how your body responds to your medicines.
- **Working closely with your health care provider.** Routine appointments with your health care provider will help you stay in control of your COPD.

## When To Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if you:

- have more coughing, sputum or phlegm than usual
- are more short of breath or wheezing than usual
- feel more tired than usual or are unable to do your normal activities
- have a fever of 100.8 F or higher
- need your rescue inhalers or nebulizers more often than normal
- have lower oxygen saturation than usual
- can't think clearly.

## When To Call 911

Call 911 or go to a hospital Emergency Department if you:

- are unable to catch your breath
- have the above symptoms for 2 days (48 hours)
- have no relief from your rescue inhaler
- have a bluish color to your lips or fingernails
- have a grayish color to your skin
- have confusion or can't easily wake up.