When Your Symptoms Get Worse

KNOW THE SIGNS OF A FLARE-UP

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) flare-ups are episodes when you may develop new symptoms or feel your usual symptoms worsen. These flare-ups—often due to a respiratory infection, illness (like a cold), or exposure to pollutants—can be uncomfortable and unpleasant, and may even require hospitalization.

**Mild flare-ups**
- Symptoms may include increased shortness of breath or coughing, more wheezing than usual, or more phlegm or mucus than usual when you cough
  - If you experience a mild flare-up, call your doctor

**Severe flare-ups**
- Symptoms of a severe flare-up could include chest pain, blue lips or fingers, confusion or drowsiness, and extreme shortness of breath or coughing
  - If you experience a severe flare-up, call 911

Plan ahead in case of an emergency—write down emergency contact phone numbers, make a list of your medications, and speak to your loved ones about what to do if your breathing worsens.
REDUCING YOUR RISK OF FLARE-UPS

As COPD progresses, flare-ups may happen more often. Each new flare-up can increase your risk of having another in the future. You can help reduce your risk of COPD flare-ups with lifestyle changes and maintenance treatments. Talk with your doctor to learn more.

Avoid COPD triggers
- Quit smoking
- Maintain good air quality in your home
- Avoid exposure to pollutants and allergens
- Consider additional lifestyle changes

Talk with your doctor
- Discuss the flu shot
- Ask about the pneumonia vaccine
- Be sure you are treating any other health conditions appropriately
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist to go over your medicines and how they’re used

Talk with your doctor about maintenance treatment
- Some maintenance treatments can reduce your risk of COPD flare-ups