



MDwise

A McLaren Company

COPD: Exacerbations

If you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), your usual shortness of breath could suddenly get worse. You may start coughing more and have more mucus. This flare-up is called a COPD exacerbation.

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.

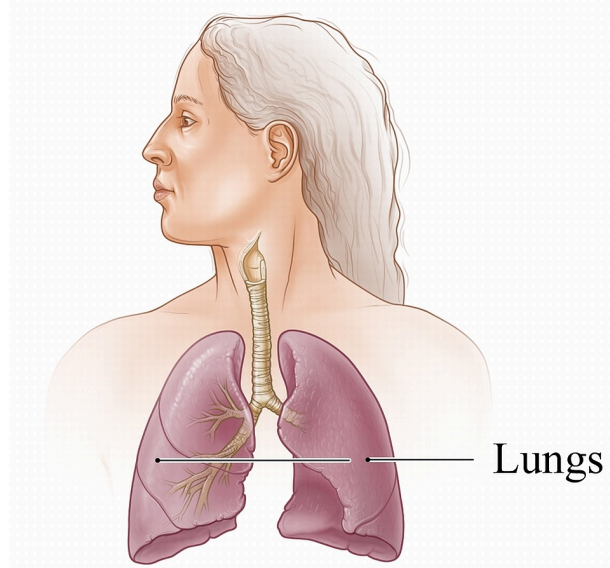
Work with your doctor to make a plan for dealing with an exacerbation. If you are prepared, you may be able to get it under control.

What are the warning signs?

When you have a COPD exacerbation, your usual symptoms quickly get worse and stay bad. This can be dangerous, and you may have to go to the hospital.

Symptoms of a flare-up include:

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



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, have someone take you to the emergency room. Call an ambulance if needed.
- Use a spacer with your metered-dose inhaler (MDI). If you have a nebulizer for inhaled medicine, use it. A spacer or nebulizer may help get more medicine to your lungs.
- If your doctor has given you other inhaled medicines or steroid pills, take them as directed.
- 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.

What treatment will you need?

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 reduce the swelling in your airways.
- A machine to help you breathe better or to breathe for you. These are called ventilation machines.
- Oxygen, to increase the amount of oxygen in your blood.

Treatment may also include:

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