



# Health care tips

## Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

### What is COPD?<sup>1,2</sup>

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a lung condition that makes it hard for you to breathe. Air gets into your lungs by going through tubes called airways. In healthy people, the airways are clear and open. People with COPD have a hard time breathing because the airways can become damaged or blocked with mucus.

### What are the causes of COPD?<sup>1,2</sup>

The most common cause of COPD is cigarette smoking. Other causes of COPD include:

- Breathing in fumes from cooking stoves or heaters at home
- Working in a dusty or smoky place
- Breathing in chemicals
- Outdoor air pollution

If your doctor thinks you may have COPD, your doctor may order a breathing test (spirometry test) to see how well air flows into and out of your lungs.

### What are the symptoms of COPD?<sup>1,2</sup>

Symptoms usually start slowly and get worse over time. COPD symptoms include:

- A cough that won't go away (persistent cough)
- A cough that produces a lot of mucus
- Trouble breathing, especially with activity
- Wheezing (a whistling sound heard when you breathe out)
- A tight feeling in your chest

## Why should I manage my COPD?<sup>1,2</sup>

If your COPD is under control, you may:

- Cough less
- Have less trouble breathing
- Feel better and stay active longer
- Keep your lungs from getting worse

## How can I control my COPD?<sup>1,2</sup>

The table below lists some ways to help you control your COPD.

Stop smoking and avoid things that can irritate your lungs like dust and pollen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If you smoke cigarettes, talk to your doctor about programs or medications that can help you quit.</li><li>• Stay away from areas with a lot of smoke, dust, pollen, pet dander, chemicals or fumes.</li></ul>
Check in with your doctor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• See your doctor at least twice a year, even when you don't feel sick.</li><li>• Take your medications as prescribed.</li><li>• Ask your doctor if you need a flu or pneumonia shot.</li></ul>
Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask your doctor about breathing exercises to help keep your lungs strong.</li><li>• Ask your doctor about activities you can do to keep your body healthy.</li></ul>
Maintain a healthy weight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If you're overweight, talk to your doctor about losing weight, which can help you breathe easier.</li><li>• Talk to your doctor about the right meal plan for you.</li><li>• Eat healthy foods with fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains.</li></ul>

## What medications can I take to control my COPD?<sup>1,3</sup>

COPD medications can help open the airways in your lungs to make breathing easier. Some examples are listed below:

- Bronchodilators relax the muscles around your airways. This opens your airways and helps you to breathe easier. Examples include ProAir<sup>®</sup> HFA (albuterol) and Spiriva<sup>®</sup> HandiHaler<sup>®</sup> (tiotropium).
- Inhaled steroids help to reduce the swelling in your airways. Examples include Flovent<sup>®</sup> HFA (fluticasone) and QVAR<sup>®</sup> (beclomethasone).
- Some COPD medications contain both a bronchodilator and a steroid. Examples include Symbicort<sup>®</sup> (budesonide and formoterol) and Advair Diskus<sup>®</sup> (fluticasone and salmeterol).

(Continued)

- If you are using bronchodilators and inhaled steroids and still have symptoms, your doctor may advise you take other COPD medications such as Theo-24® (theophylline) or Daliresp® (roflumilast). Theo-24 opens up the airways in your lungs to make it easier for you to breathe. Daliresp reduces the swelling in your airways and helps to prevent COPD flare-ups. Your doctor will work with you to choose the medication that's right for you.
- There are long-acting and short-acting COPD medications. The short-acting medications work fast to help you breathe easier. Long-acting medications help to control your COPD but may take longer to work. If you're not sure which medication is long-acting or short-acting, ask your pharmacist or doctor.

## **When should I get emergency help?<sup>1,2</sup>**

Go to the hospital or see your doctor right away if any of this happens to you:

- Your breathing gets worse, making it hard to talk or walk.
- Your lips or fingernails turn gray or blue.
- Your heartbeat is very fast.
- Your medication doesn't seem to be working, and your breathing is still fast and hard.
- Your mind becomes less alert.

Plan ahead for emergencies by keeping these important things in one place:

- Phone numbers of your doctor, hospital, pharmacy and people who can take you there.
- Directions to the hospital, doctor's office and pharmacy.
- A current list of your medications, including over-the-counter (OTC) medication vitamins and herbs.
- Extra money.

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**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** | 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) | [cdc.gov/asthma](https://cdc.gov/asthma)

**Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease** | [goldcopd.org/patients-advocacy-groups/](https://goldcopd.org/patients-advocacy-groups/)

**National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute** | Phone: 1-301-592-8573 | [nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/copd](https://nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/copd)

**American Lung Association** | 1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-586-4872)  
| [lung.org/lung-health-and-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/](https://lung.org/lung-health-and-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/)

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<sup>1</sup> National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute website. What is COPD? [nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/copd/](https://nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/copd/). Accessed November 2, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> COPD Foundation website. What is COPD? [copdfoundation.org/What-is-COPD/Understanding-COPD/What-is-COPD.aspx](https://copdfoundation.org/What-is-COPD/Understanding-COPD/What-is-COPD.aspx). Accessed November 2, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Clinical Pharmacology website [database online]. [clinicalpharmacology.com](https://clinicalpharmacology.com). Accessed November 2, 2017.

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