



COPD Flare-up

A COPD flare-up (or an exacerbation) can be scary for both the person living with COPD and his or her caregiver. Sometimes COPD flare-ups can be minor, but sometimes they can be severe. It's important to know what a flare-up looks like and how to respond. This resource is designed to help people living with COPD know how to prevent a flare-up, prepare for a flare-up and respond to a COPD flare-up.

Review the signs of a flare-up

It is important to know how to recognize the signs of a flare-up. Below is a list of things to look for:

- An ongoing or more severe cough;
- A cough that produces a lot of mucus;
- Increased shortness of breath, especially with physical activity or when resting;
- Wheezing or a whistling or squeaky sound when breathing;
- Chest tightness;
- Cold or flu-like symptoms.

Know how to prevent a flare-up

Early detection is important, be aware of the signs and symptoms above, call your doctor at the first sign of a change to your baseline health. You should also:

- Avoid others that are sick, when able;
- Practice good hand washing;
- Speak to your doctor about proper nutrition and pulmonary rehabilitation;
- Seek out information to help you or your loved one stop smoking;
- Get the proper vaccines (e.g., flu and pneumonia vaccines).

Know how to prepare for a flare-up

Even with the best prevention practice, a flare-up may still occur. It is important to focus on planning. Being prepared will help you and your caregivers know what to do in the event of a flare-up:

- Speak with your health care provider to determine the best medications for a flare-up;
- Know your triggers and avoidance strategies (e.g. make your home smoke-free, treat allergies, etc.);
- Keep your medication lists current and on hand at all times;
- Know the locations of emergency rooms or urgent care facilities and identify a Power of Attorney (POA);
- Prepare your home with a stock of food, water, medications and medical device supplies.

Know how to respond to a flare-up

- Develop a COPD action plan with your health care provider and share it with your caregivers;
- Track and review signs and symptoms; identify when a symptom is not normal or may be an emergency (i.e., chest pain, fever, shortness of breath not subsiding with rest, etc.);
- Communicate your symptoms with caregivers; and,
- Contact your doctor when symptoms are not normal.

If you are experiencing a COPD emergency, which may include symptoms such as fast or irregular heartbeat, difficulty walking or talking, breathing fast and hard, call 911 immediately.