



INSPIRATION COPD NEWSLETTER

Respiratory Health Association's newsletter for people living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), their families, and caregivers.



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INHALER COPAY CAP IS NOW IN EFFECT!

The Illinois Inhaler Copay Cap law lowering the cost of inhalers is now in effect. For people living with COPD and other chronic lung diseases, using prescribed inhalers regularly can reduce flare-ups and lower the risk of serious complications related to their lung disease, but cost has long been a major barrier. In the past, about 1 in 6 people with COPD skipped medication because prices could reach \$300 per month or more. This new law helps remove that barrier by capping co-pays for rescue and controller inhalers at \$25 for a 30-day supply and exempting inhalers from insurance deductibles. This helps make these life-saving medications more affordable and accessible.

With this change now enacted, more people with COPD should be able to consistently access their inhalers, better manage symptoms, avoid severe flare-ups, and reduce emergency department visits and hospitalizations. If you have trouble getting your inhaler covered under this law, talk with your healthcare provider or pharmacist. You can also file a complaint with the Illinois Department of Insurance to report coverage issues and get help resolving them at: <https://doi.illinois.gov/consumers/file-a-complaint.html>

WHAT IS COPD?

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a combination of lung damage and mucus production that makes it hard to breathe. COPD is used to describe emphysema, chronic bronchitis, or a combination of the two. Symptoms include cough, shortness of breath, wheezing, and chest tightness.

LIVING BETTER TOGETHER® CONFERENCE 2025 RECAP



Respiratory Health Association (RHA) hosted its 21st annual Living Better Together COPD Conference on November 20, 2025, at the Meridian Banquets and Conference Center in Rolling Meadows, Illinois. Attendees represented a diverse mix of individuals living with COPD, caregivers, pulmonary rehab staff, and people living with other respiratory conditions, including asthma, sarcoidosis, vasculitis, and cystic fibrosis. Supplemental oxygen was generously donated by Health Care Solutions Group and was made available throughout the day to help ensure participants could fully engage in the conference.

The day opened with a moderated Ask the Healthcare Provider session, which focused on real-world challenges facing people living with COPD, including the rising cost of care, insurance coverage issues, medication access, and prior authorizations.

Educational sessions throughout the day covered a wide range of topics, including home oxygen use, medication updates and inhaler technique, nutrition and chronic lung disease, cardiovascular comorbidities, women and chronic lung disease, and chair yoga.

The conference also included an advocacy activity focused on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's national soot (PM_{2.5}) health standard.

Attendees learned how decisions about air quality standards directly affect respiratory health and had the opportunity to take action by writing letters urging continued protections for clean air.

Looking ahead, RHA plans to host the next Living Better Together COPD Conference on November 19, 2026, at the same venue. You can visit RHA's website to view the sessions and find other conference resources:

<https://resphealth.org/living-better-together-copd-conference/>.





NUTRITION AND COPD: HOW ADOPTING A HEALTHY DIET CAN HELP YOU BETTER MANAGE YOUR COPD

Eating a well-balanced, healthy diet not only helps you to maintain a healthy weight but can also help better manage your COPD. The food you eat provides the energy your body needs for all activities, and living with COPD can increase the amount of energy your body uses. A poor diet can make breathing harder and increase fatigue. However, a healthy diet can reduce inflammation, preserve and enhance muscle strength, improve lung function, and decrease the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

A healthy, balanced diet with plenty of antioxidants and anti-inflammatory foods can help keep your COPD symptoms under control. Here are some examples of the types of foods to include in your diet:

- Fresh or frozen fruit
- Green leafy vegetables
- Whole grains (ex: oats, brown rice, quinoa, barley, and whole-wheat bread)
- Beans and lentils (excellent sources of fiber)
- Clean sources of protein (lean meats such as chicken and turkey, eggs, low-fat Greek yogurt, and cottage cheese)
- Healthy fats (avocados, nuts, seeds, olive oil, and fatty fish such as salmon or sardines)

Since people with COPD use more energy for breathing, it is natural that concerns about nutrition may develop. Below are some common concerns and ways to manage them.

CONCERN: SHORTNESS OF BREATH DURING OR AFTER MEALS

- Rest just before eating
- Eat slowly and take smaller bites of foods
- Sit upright while eating
- Take a break in between bites and practice deep breathing exercises
- Eat more food in the morning, if that is when you have more energy
- Eat 4 to 6 small meals a day

CONCERN: WEIGHT LOSS OR WEIGHT GAIN

It is important to speak with your health care provider about any significant or unplanned weight changes, as unexplained or unintentional weight loss may be a sign of a more serious health issue.



To gain weight, add calorie-dense foods such as:

- Dried fruit
- Nuts and seeds
- Sweet potatoes
- Avocado
- Fish

To lose weight, limit your intake of healthy fats and include foods such as:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Lean protein (skinless chicken breast, turkey, lean ground meats, tofu, beans, chickpeas, etc.)
- Avoid mindless or uncontrolled eating throughout the day
- Try to quit eating around 7-8 pm

CONCERN: LOSS OF APPETITE

- Try eating every few hours, even if it's a small amount
- Keep healthy snacks readily available
- Drink nutritional supplements or high protein smoothies to boost calorie and protein intake
- Eat your largest meal when you are the most hungry
- Light exercise, such as a walk before a meal, may help improve your appetite

Nutrition plays an important role in managing COPD more effectively. Your diet can either fuel or fight chronic inflammation associated with COPD. Eating a balanced, nutrient-rich diet can help maintain strength, support lung function, boost energy levels, and improve your body's ability to cope with daily challenges and flare-ups. It's important to talk with your health care provider about nutrition choices that can help you better manage your COPD.



LOOSENED REQUIREMENTS FOR RSV VACCINE HELP ILLINOISANS PROTECT THEMSELVES

In the Fall of 2025, the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) updated its recommendations for the RSV vaccine, in line with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The RSV vaccine is recommended for:

- Adults aged 50–74 who are at higher risk for severe RSV illness, including people living with COPD and other chronic lung diseases
- All adults aged 75 and older

In addition, HFS is removing prior authorization requirements for Medicaid patients, making it easier for eligible individuals to receive the RSV vaccine. If you're unsure whether the RSV vaccine is right for you, talk with your healthcare provider.

COPD PATIENT HANDBOOK

RHA plans to develop and distribute a new comprehensive guide for COPD patients. If you would like to participate in our planning efforts to help determine content, please send an email to Erica Salem at ESalem@RespHealth.org.

ASK THE HEALTHCARE PROVIDER: CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE AND COPD

DEEPA RAMADURAI, MD
University of Chicago



How does having COPD affect my heart, and what heart problems should I be watching for?

If you have COPD, you have an increased risk of also having heart disease. Heart disease can encompass blockages in the arteries that supply the heart with blood, as well as abnormal heart rhythms and heart failure. This is because both COPD and heart disease share similar risk factors, including age and having a history of prior or current smoking. The symptoms of COPD and heart disease are similar, including shortness of breath, which worsens with exertion and chest tightness. You should keep an eye on what makes these symptoms better and worse, and if you have additional symptoms such as cough or mucus production. This can help to understand whether your symptoms are related to COPD or heart disease.

Why am I at higher risk for heart problems after a COPD flare or hospitalization, and what can I do to lower that risk?

We do not know exactly why people have more heart problems after a COPD flare, but it is probably related to the inflammation throughout the body that happens with the COPD flare. This increased risk of heart problems can last for up to one year. It is important that you take medications to keep your COPD under control and that you discuss whether you need labs or testing for heart disease with your doctor.

If I also have high blood pressure, heart failure, or another heart condition, how should my COPD treatment be adjusted?

You should always discuss your COPD and heart disease with your doctor when diagnosed with new conditions and/or starting new medications. In general, all inhalers for COPD are safe for heart disease, and most medications for heart disease are safe for people with COPD.

Are the inhalers and medications I take for COPD safe for my heart?

In general, medications for COPD are safe for your heart. It is important to control your COPD and limit flares because flares can increase the risk of heart issues. If you are taking medications like roflumilast, azithromycin, or theophylline for your COPD, you should discuss with your lung and heart doctors to make sure you are being monitored for side effects related to the heart. If you have heart disease, check with your heart doctor to make sure none of your medications could be contributing to more shortness of breath (including beta blockers) or coughing (including ACE inhibitors).

When I feel short of breath or chest tightness, how can I tell if it's my lungs or my heart—and when should I seek care?

Every person is different. When you are having symptoms, try to make note of if there is anything that is triggering them (for example, body position, physical activity). Chest pain is typically related to heart issues, and chest tightness, coughing, and wheezing are typically related to lung issues. Some people might have overlapping symptoms, however, so if you have any of these symptoms, you should consult with your doctor. Any new symptoms or changes in symptoms from what you experience day to day should be communicated with your doctors.





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Respiratory Health Association is a Chicago-based lung health charity focused on preventing lung disease, promoting clean air, and helping people live better through education, research, and policy change.

For more information about RHA and our work on COPD, contact:

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This newsletter is not intended to provide specific medical advice, but general information for people living with COPD and their caregivers. If you think you may have COPD, talk to your healthcare provider.

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