



Live well with COPD



HUNTSVILLE
HOSPITAL

CENTER FOR  LUNG HEALTH



Understanding COPD

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease describes several different lung conditions that can lead to blocking the airflow out of the lungs. Breathing can become more difficult, especially with activity. Lung function worsens over time; however medicine and other treatments may be able to slow or reverse some of the symptoms. In most cases COPD is caused by cigarette smoking, but can also be from occupational exposure or genetics.

If you smoke, quitting is the most important thing you can do. Quitting may help slow down your COPD by:

- Preventing more damage to your lungs
- Helping you breathe easier
- Increasing energy
- Decreasing risk of heart disease, lung disease, cancer and other health problems
- Making the air in your home cleaner and healthier

What might I feel?

When you have COPD, you may have to work harder to breathe. You may also have one or more of the following symptoms:

- Shortness of breath (breathing may be more difficult)
- Trouble exhaling (breathing out)
- Frequent cough with or without mucus
- Wheezing
- Tire easily and more often

Managing your COPD

Recognizing a flare-up

A **flare-up** (also known as exacerbation) is when you develop new symptoms or feel old symptoms worsen. It can be caused by an infection and can be serious. Flare-ups can actually cause your COPD to progress faster, so it is important to recognize early warning signs and immediately take action to stop them. We recommend that you keep your **flare-up/rescue** medications in a *separate box* from your maintenance medications.

Pay attention to your symptoms. Don't ignore the early signs. Call your doctor for instructions.

Tips to avoid flare-up

- Quit smoking. The Huntsville Hospital Center for Lung Health can provide you with an effective program to quit smoking. Call (256) 265-7071 for more information.
- Take your maintenance medications every day as you are instructed, including maintenance inhalers.
- Avoid dust, smoke, fumes and chemicals that can make it hard to breathe.
- See your doctor regularly as scheduled, even if you feel fine.
- Stay away from crowds especially during cold and flu season.
- Wash your hands with soap and water often.
- Get your annual flu vaccine.
- Ask your doctor about the pneumonia vaccine.

COPD ZONES

GREEN ZONE – Feel good

- My sputum is the usual color (clear or white) and cleared easily
- My breathing is no harder than usual
- I can do my usual activities
- I am able to think clearly

Action:

Take your normal medications, including oxygen, as instructed by your doctor.

YELLOW ZONE – Feel worse

- My sputum has changed (color, thickness, amount)
- I am more short of breath than normal
- I cough or wheeze more
- I weigh more and my legs/feet swell
- I cannot do my usual activities without resting

Action:

Call your doctor immediately. You may be instructed to begin taking additional medications. Have your pharmacy phone number available.

EMERGENCY – Feel in danger

- I cannot cough out my sputum
- I am much more short of breath than normal
- I have to sit up to breathe
- I cannot do my usual activities
- I am unable to speak more than one or two words at a time
- I feel confused

Action:

Call your doctor immediately. You may be asked to come in to be seen, be told to go to the emergency room or call 9-1-1.

COPD Medications

There are many medications to treat COPD. Some are inhaled as a mist, some are pills. The most common are:

- **Bronchodilators** Relaxes and opens the tubes in the lungs so air can get in and out more easily.
- **Steroid** Reduce sensitivity and inflammation of the airway.
- **Mucolytics** Helps thin and liquefy mucus created in the lungs.
- **Antibiotics** Fight infection; may be used during flare-up.

Your doctor will prescribe maintenance and **flare-up/rescue** medications. You will need to know which of your medications are maintenance (taken every day) and which ones are flare-up/rescue medications (used when you have a flare-up). It is very important to take your medications every day as prescribed to effectively manage your COPD and help you breathe.

Maintenance medications

- Used every day to manage your COPD.
- Keep lungs open so you can breathe as well as possible and stay active.
- Generally longer acting (12 – 24 hours) and help prevent **flare-ups**.

Flare-up/rescue medications

- Used to treat **flare-ups**.
- Generally fast-acting and provide temporary relief for sudden symptoms.
- If you frequently find yourself using rescue medication, **tell your doctor**. He/she may want to adjust your maintenance medication.



Using inhalers: Did you know?

- An inhaler is a device used to deliver medications (bronchodilators and or anti-inflammatory) into your lungs. It is very important to learn the correct way to use an inhaler.
- There are many different types of inhalers available, so you will need to speak with your respiratory therapist, nurse or pharmacist to show you how to correctly use the one prescribed by your doctor.
- Some inhalers are used daily (maintenance inhalers); and some are used for a flare-up (rescue inhalers).
- Ask your doctor if you are unsure how to use your inhaler and if the inhaler is for maintenance or rescue.
- Remember to use your maintenance inhaler as scheduled. Do not skip doses as this helps keep the breathing tubes open.
- Rinse your mouth out after each treatment of a steroid inhaler.
- Many inhalers have more than one name. Be sure you know your medication.
- If you frequently find yourself using rescue medication, **tell your doctor**. He/she may want to adjust your maintenance medication.

Using nebulizers

A nebulizer is a machine used to deliver a medication (bronchodilator) in mist form into the lungs. If you are prescribed one, it is very important to clean it every day to prevent infection.

Using breathing techniques

Breathing techniques help you breathe the bad air out and the fresh air in, while also helping to control breathing. Breathing techniques can increase your oxygen levels, help keep tubes in your lungs from collapsing, reduce trapped air in your lungs and slow down your breathing.

Pursed lips breathing

- Breathe in through your nose (sniff a flower), then breathe out through pursed/puckered lips (blow out a candle).
- Be sure to breathe out slowly and comfortably. Forcing the air out will create tension instead of relaxation and control.





Oxygen Therapy

Your doctor will decide if you need to be on oxygen at home. Before the doctor writes the prescription, there are guidelines that have to be met in order for Medicare and insurance to pay. If your doctor has prescribed oxygen, remember **oxygen is combustible**.

- Make sure there is NO SMOKING in your home.
- Store oxygen away from heat and direct sunlight.
- Keep oil, grease and other flammable material away from your oxygen system.
- Keep candles and other sources of flames at least 10 feet away from any place oxygen is in use or stored.
- Avoid wearing nylon clothing (such as nightgowns) and woolen blankets to prevent static electricity and sparks.
- Do not use vapor rubs, petroleum jelly, aerosol sprays such as hair sprays or air fresheners near the oxygen unit, as these are all very flammable.
- Be prepared ahead of time for potential power outages. During storms or tornadoes there is a possibility of sudden power outages that can last for hours or days. It is recommended to have a portable generator to power your oxygen in case of extended outages. Have a plan if you don't have a backup generator.

Use your oxygen as prescribed. Some people are self-conscious when they have to wear oxygen, but using it as prescribed can make a difference in how you feel.



Exercise and COPD

You may believe that people with COPD are too short of breath to exercise. This is a myth. The truth is, regular activity can help you feel less short of breath, improve your heart muscle, increase your endurance, and improve your quality of life. It will also improve your ability to relax and sleep.

Outpatient Pulmonary Rehabilitation

Ask your doctor if you qualify for outpatient pulmonary rehab services at the Center for Lung Health. The staff is highly trained and dedicated to help you live well with COPD.

Outpatient Pulmonary Rehab Services include:

- **Monitored doctor-prescribed exercise program** individually designed to help you improve and maintain your activity level and improve your health and quality of life.
- **Medication classes** to help you understand your medications, including proper use of inhalers.
- **Classes to help you manage your COPD.** Topics include prevention of flare-ups, secretion clearance, oxygen therapy, relaxation techniques, nutrition and sleep.
- **Opportunity to meet with other COPD patients** for patient/caregiver support.



Six steps to live better with COPD

1. Stop smoking and avoid chemicals, dust and other sources that can irritate your lungs.
2. Take your maintenance medications **every day**. This will help you breathe better and reduce the chance of flare-up. Keep your flare-up/rescue medications in a separate box that is readily available.
3. Be prepared — Keep your doctor and pharmacy phone number handy. Contact your doctor for instructions when you experience worsening symptoms (**yellow zone**). Your doctor may instruct you to come in to the office for evaluation or instruct you to use additional medications from your flare-up/rescue medication box. Practice pursed lip breathing.
4. Attend all scheduled appointments with your doctor, even when you feel fine. Your doctor will want to make sure you are doing well with your current medications.
5. Don't be sedentary. Participate in some form of exercise or activity.
6. Wash your hands and avoid being around others who are ill to prevent infection.

Preparing for your doctor's appointment

1. Bring all of your medicines in their original containers.
2. Keep a log of how often you use your rescue inhalers.
This will help your doctor determine your maintenance medications.
3. Bring a list of questions with you.
4. Remember, it is very important to keep all of your scheduled appointments.

Important Numbers

My primary care doctor

Name: _____ Phone: _____

My lung doctor (pulmonologist)

Name: _____ Phone: _____

My pharmacy

Name: _____ Phone: _____

My emergency contact

Name: _____ Phone: _____

My oxygen company

Name: _____ Phone: _____

My home health company

Name: _____ Phone: _____



**HUNTSVILLE
HOSPITAL**

CENTER FOR LUNG HEALTH

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Hours: Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

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