

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

COPD stands for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. This is a chronic (long-term) disease caused by permanent damage to the lungs, most often due to cigarette smoke. A COPD exacerbation or flare is a worsening of the shortness of breath, along with increased sputum production (the phlegm that you cough up) or an increase in the purulence of the sputum (i.e. it is thicker and greener than usual).

Unfortunately, the treatment for COPD doesn't work immediately. Instead it works gradually, over time.

HOW TO CARE FOR YOURSELF AT HOME

- + If you were prescribed antibiotics and prednisone (a steroid), take the full course of both. Prednisone is very helpful for your lungs. If you take it for many months, it can have lots of long-term side effects, but in the short-term, it will likely just make you feel moody and have an increased appetite. Some patients have difficulty sleeping when taking prednisone. If this happens to you, take the prednisone first thing in the morning, rather than later in the day.
- + If you have COPD, you have probably been taking long-acting puffers, like Spiriva or Advair. Keep using these puffers, but in a COPD exacerbation you will need to add a short-acting puffer as well, like Ventolin (salbutamol, the blue puffer) or

Atrovent (ipratropium, green puffer). Take two puffs of the short-acting puffer every four hours while you are awake for the next couple of days, then as needed.

- + If you haven't used the Atrovent in three days or the Ventolin in 14 days, you need to prime it before you use it again. To prime it, take off the cap and point the puffer away from you. Next, press the button on the puffer four times.
- + To use the puffer, breathe out, put your lips on the puffer and then breathe in gradually and fully as you press the button on the puffer.
- + Drink lots of water, avoid places where smoke is present, and remember to get your flu vaccination.
- + If you smoke, consider looking up quitting programs. Please see the link in the "Relevant Resources" section.
- + Avoid using e-cigarettes, vape pens, or other related products.

WHEN TO GET HELP

Go to the nearest Emergency Department

if you are experiencing any of the following:

- + If you cannot speak a full sentence when sitting down.
- + If your shortness of breath is worse than when you left the ED.
- + If you have a new fever, or you have developed a fever (38.0°C/100.4°F or higher) after two days of taking the antibiotics.
- + If you have increased confusion.
- + Call 911 if unable to safely get to the ED

RECOMMENDED FOLLOW UP

- Follow up with your primary care provider in ___ days.

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Find this information sheet on the BC Emergency Medicine Network website:

www.bcemn.ca/clinical_resource/chronic-obstructive-pulmonary-disease/

RELEVANT RESOURCES

- + To learn more about how to quit smoking, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/pharmacare-for-bc-residents/what-we-cover/drug-coverage/bc-smoking-cessation-program>

TO LEARN MORE ASK

- + Your family doctor.
- + HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf or hard of hearing) or go online to www.HealthLinkBC.ca