



Taking charge of your COPD

United
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Community Plan





You can take charge of your COPD

If you have Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), you may have questions. Which medicines treat it? What can I do to stay as healthy as possible? What is a COPD action plan? Why do I need one?

Don't let these questions worry you. With the help of your doctor, medicine and basic healthy habits, you can manage your COPD.

COPD is a group of lung diseases that make it hard to breathe. These most common diseases are:

Emphysema – The air sacs are damaged, which make it hard to push out old air and breathe in fresh air.

Chronic bronchitis – The airways are swollen and clogged with mucus (thick fluid). This makes it hard for air to pass through the lungs.



Medicines for COPD

If you have COPD, your doctor may tell you to take one or more medicines. It's important to know what they are and what they do.

Bronchodilators relax the muscles around the airways in the lungs to help you breathe easier. There are two types:

- **Long-acting bronchodilators.** Take these every day. Take your medicines as directed by your doctor, even if you don't have symptoms.
- **Short-acting bronchodilators.** Use these when you have problems breathing. They can quickly relax and open the airways in your lungs.

Inhaled steroids help bring down the swelling of your airways.

Inhaled steroids are different from pill steroids. Pill steroids are generally recommended only for short-term use in COPD treatment.

Antibiotics are medicines that fight infections caused by bacteria.

This is not a complete list of COPD medications. Discuss all of your medication options with your doctor.



Help your medicines work. Take them just as your doctor tells you to. Don't change the amount you take. And don't stop taking them. Talk to your doctor if you have any concerns.

Using your inhaler

An inhaler might seem easy to use. But you need to use it the right way for it to work.

How to use a metered dose inhaler (MDI):

1. Take off the cap. Shake the inhaler.
2. Breathe out slowly.
3. Hold the inhaler the way your doctor showed you. It should be slightly away from your mouth – a space about two fingers wide.
4. Slowly breathe in through your mouth at the same time you press down on the inhaler. Keep breathing in for three to five seconds.
5. Now hold your breath for 10 seconds, if possible. Then breathe out slowly.
6. Do this again as ordered by your doctor. Wait at least one minute between puffs.

An inhaler may be hard to use if a person can't breathe in deeply. Here are some tools that may help:

- **Spacer** – This is attached to an inhaler. It can help get the medicine down into the lungs, instead of only going into the mouth.
- **Nebulizer** – This is also called a breathing machine. It creates a mist of medicine. You inhale the mist for 5 to 10 minutes.

There are many different kinds of inhalers. Be sure to bring yours with you to your next doctor visit. They can check to see if you're using it correctly.



Work with your doctor

When working with any doctor, it's important to work as a team. Tell your doctor about how you're feeling. Listen carefully and ask questions. The more you work together, the better your doctor will be able to treat your COPD.

Be prepared for your doctor visit

- Bring a list of everything you take.
 - Prescription medicines.
 - Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines.
 - Supplements or herbs.
 - Vitamins.
- Bring your COPD Action Plan. Talk about any changes that might be needed. Make sure your action plan is right for you.
- Bring a list of your questions for the doctor. Not sure what to ask? Look at the list on page 5 of this booklet to get you started.
- Be sure your doctor:
 - Makes time for your questions.
 - Listens to you.

Depending on what you need care for, there are a few different types of doctors you may see.

1

Primary care doctor

You see this doctor for all types of health concerns. They often can help you manage your COPD, too. If you don't have a primary doctor, call the Member Services number listed on the back of your ID card. You can also find one by visiting myuhc.com/CommunityPlan and using the Find-a-Doctor tool.

2

Lung doctor (pulmonologist)

This is a specialist. You may be referred to this type of doctor, if needed. It will depend on how your COPD is doing.

Be sure to check your benefit plan for specific coverage details.



It's important to choose the right doctor. Pick one that listens to you and helps you take steps to stay healthy. Make sure they have a plan to take care of your heart disease.



Ask your doctor

Bring a list of questions to your next doctor visit. The following questions can help you get started.

- Am I taking the right medicine(s) for my COPD? Am I using it correctly?
- How do I take care of a respiratory infection?
- Are there any tips that can help me breathe easier when it gets hard?
- How much should I exercise each day? What exercises are best?
- What's the best way to quit smoking?



What triggers to avoid

Triggers are things that make your COPD worse. They put stress on your lungs and make it harder to breathe.

Some common triggers:

- **Smoke.** Don't smoke. And stay away from other people's smoke. If you do smoke, quit. Don't put it off another day. Ask your doctor about medicines and other products to help you quit. They will tell you if they're right for you. You can also call **1-800-QUIT-NOW** (1-800-784-8669) or visit **smokefree.gov** for more help and information.
- **Smog.** Check air quality reports for the day. Stay indoors if the air is bad.
- **Strong smells.** They can irritate the lungs. Watch out for room fresheners, insect sprays, perfumes and hair spray.
- **Dust and fine powders.** When cleaning your house, use a wet mop or cloth to keep dust from flying. If working in the garden, wear a face mask.
- **Very cold, hot or humid weather.** Stay indoors, if possible. Put a scarf over your nose and mouth when it's cold.
- **Respiratory infection.**



You can't avoid your triggers all the time. A trigger might pop up suddenly. Do your best to move away from it.

Stay healthy and avoid risks

Take an active role in managing your COPD. You'll find that being mindful of your habits and surroundings can help you live a healthier life.

Team up with your doctors

- Don't miss doctor visits.
- Take your medicines. Talk with your doctor about how to take your medicine the right way.
- Use your action plan. Talk with your doctor about it at each visit.

Take charge with the basics

- Eat good foods that fuel your body. Your doctor can tell you more about smart choices for you.
- Keep your body moving. Exercise is important for healthy lungs. Want to start exercising? Want to exercise more than you have been? Talk to your doctor first.
- Get enough sleep. You'll feel stronger when you're rested.

Avoid routine sickness

- Protect against flu and pneumonia. Ask your doctor if a flu shot is right for you. Also, ask your doctor about a pneumonia shot. Those you live with should get the shots they need, too.
- Take care. Try to stay away from anyone who is sick or has a cold or the flu.
- Avoid irritants. Try to stay away from sources of bacteria, dust and other pollutants to help prevent lung infection.

Help your mind and body work together

- Learn to manage stress. Take slow, deep breaths. Think about peaceful scenes. Talk with understanding loved ones.
- Watch for signs of depression. Having COPD can be hard at times. If you feel depressed or are struggling with your feelings, tell your doctor so they can help.

Pursed lip breathing

This is an easy way to get control of your breath. It allows you to let go of air that's trapped in your lungs so you can let fresh air in.

Take it one step at a time:

1. Relax your neck and shoulders.
2. Slowly breathe in through your nose. Keep your lips closed. Count to 2 or 3.
3. Pucker your lips as if you were going to whistle. Slowly breathe out. Count to 5 or 6.

It should take you twice as long to breathe out as it did to breathe in. Ask your doctor if pursed lip breathing is right for you.



COPD action plan To be completed with your doctor.

Green Zone – doing well.

I feel fine when:

- I am eating OK with a good appetite.
- I do not have any change with my cough.
- I am sleeping well.
- I can do my usual activities.

Use your daily medicines.

Medicine	Dose	How often

Yellow Zone – I am having a bad day.

Signs that symptoms are worse:

- Hard to breath, need to use inhaler more.
- Coughing more than normal.
- Hard time sleeping.
- Fever.

What to do:

- Call your doctor about your symptoms.
- See your doctor if you think you have an infection.
- Eat small amounts more often.

Continue your daily medicines. Increase or start the following medicines.

Medicine	Dose	How often

Red Zone – I need help.

Emergency symptoms:

- Very short breath, even at rest.
- Feeling agitated, fearful, drowsy or confused.
- Chest pain and high fever.

What to do:

If you are experiencing these symptoms, call 911.

Continue your daily medicines. Increase or start the following medicines. Call 911.

Medicine	Dose	How often



Helpful resources

American Lung Association
www.lung.org

National Institutes of Health
www.nih.gov

UnitedHealthcare Community Plan
myuhc.com/CommunityPlan
UHCCommunityPlan.com

Important Contacts

Doctor's name: _____ Phone: _____

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Pharmacy: _____ Phone: _____

Urgent Care: _____ Phone: _____

Hospital: _____ Phone: _____

If there's an emergency, call 911.

