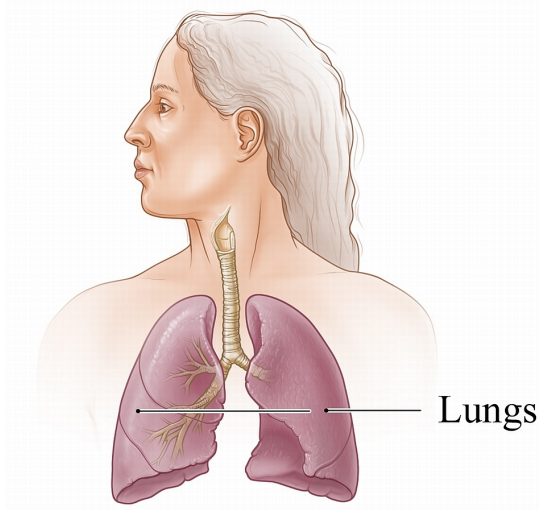


COPD: Exacerbations



If you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), your usual shortness of breath could suddenly get worse. You may start coughing more and have more mucus. This flare-up is called a COPD exacerbation.

A lung infection or air pollution could set off an exacerbation. Sometimes it can happen after a quick change in temperature or being around chemicals. You may not always know the cause.

Work with your doctor to make a plan for dealing with an exacerbation. If you are prepared, you may be able to get it under control.

What are the warning signs?

When you have a COPD exacerbation, your normal symptoms suddenly get worse:

- You have more shortness of breath and wheezing.
- You have more coughing with or without mucus.
- You have a change in the color or amount of the mucus.
- You have a fever.

- You are not able to sleep, and you feel very tired.
- You are depressed or confused.

What should you do if you have a COPD exacerbation?

It can be a **life-threatening emergency**. **Do not panic** if you start to have one. Quick treatment at home may help you prevent serious breathing problems.

Try using your quick-relief inhaler first. If your symptoms do not get better after you use your medicine, have someone take you to the emergency room.

Call 911 if:

- You also are having chest pain.
- You feel like you are suffocating.
- You are not sure how serious your exacerbation is.

After treatment, most people recover. They have the same amount of shortness of breath they had before the exacerbation.

What treatment will you need?

Treatment depends on how serious your symptoms are. You may go to your doctor or a clinic several times for treatment. Or you may have to go to the hospital.

- If you have to go to the hospital, you may need a machine for a short time to help you breathe. It is called a ventilator. This is used only if medicine does not help.
- You may get oxygen.

- If you have a lung infection, you may get antibiotics.
- You may need corticosteroid pills for a short time, if you are not taking them already.

You may have other treatments if you need them. Usually this is because the first treatments did not help or you have health problems.

- You may need IV fluids (given in a vein) if you are dehydrated.
- You may need other medicines to help open the airways in your lungs. These are called bronchodilators.
- You may need medicines called diuretics if you have fluid buildup in your body.