

# LIVING WITH COPD

Positive steps you can take to help manage your health



# Living with COPD

**By making lifestyle and activity changes, you can take an active role in treating your COPD and improving your health.**

**This booklet offers important information and explores some positive steps that you can use in a variety of real-life situations, including:**

- **What is COPD?**
- **Effective breathing techniques**
- **Exercise, nutrition, and travel recommendations**
- **Tips for easing daily tasks and avoiding infections**
- **Helpful COPD resources**

## What is COPD?

COPD stands for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema. COPD is characterized by a permanent narrowing or constriction of the airways that leads to breathing difficulties.

**Two causes of your COPD symptoms can include:**

- Airway constriction
- Airway inflammation

**COPD results in:**

- Narrowing of the lungs' airways
- Increased inflammation in the walls of air passages
- Breathing difficulties

**Your doctor will prescribe the appropriate medication to help manage your COPD. It is very important that you use this medication as directed.**

## WHAT CAUSES COPD?

**Over 800,000 Canadians suffer from COPD.**

In Canada, smoking causes about 80-90% of COPD cases. Smoking is also a trigger for COPD breathing difficulties and flare-ups.

**Other causes of COPD are:**

- Second-hand smoke
- Occupational dusts and chemicals
- Repeated lung infections as a child
- Alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency (a genetic condition)

## NEVER QUIT QUITTING

**The single most important step you can take to treat COPD is to quit smoking.**

Quitting smoking can dramatically improve your breathing. Quitting can help prevent further damage to your lungs, reduce your COPD flare-ups, and slow down the disease.

It often takes a few attempts to quit for good, but there are effective programs that can help you quit.

**The health benefits of quitting start within hours.**

## Breathing Techniques

### WHEN YOU HAVE COPD, EVERY BREATH COUNTS.

Follow these proven breathing techniques to help you get the most out of each breath.

**Before you start any breathing technique, take a minute to drop your shoulders down, close your eyes, and relax your body.**

### PURSED-LIPS BREATHING

Pursed-lips breathing is a technique that can help you get the air you need without working so hard. It can help you focus, slow your breathing, and stay calm. It is recommended that pursed-lips breathing be used during and after exercise. It can be used with any activity that makes you feel short of breath.

#### To do pursed-lips breathing:

1. Breathe in through your nose for a few seconds – as if you are smelling something.
2. Pucker your lips – like you're getting ready to blow out candles on a birthday cake.
3. Breathe out very slowly through your pursed lips – exhaling for 4-6 seconds.



## Breathing Tips: Stop, Reset, Continue

Are you short of breath during exercise or regular activities?

Try these steps:

1. Pause your activity.
2. Reset by sitting down, relax your shoulders, and do pursed-lips breathing until you catch your breath.
3. Continue the activity, doing pursed-lips breathing as you go. Consider going at a slower pace.







# Staying Active with COPD

## ENJOY YOUR HOBBIES

All hobbies are different but here are some common tips to help you enjoy yours whilst still looking after your lungs.

- **Know your limits.** You know your body best. If you notice that you're having a hard time breathing, take a break. Some days you may be able to do more than other days. This is normal. On bad days simply don't push yourself as hard.
- **Change how you engage.** You can make your hobbies easier on your lungs. For example if you enjoy walking, on days with low air quality, do it indoors on a treadmill.
- **Try something new.** If you're no longer able to do an activity you once loved, why not try a new hobby that is easier on your lungs, like reading or light yoga. You may be surprised how many new activities there are out there that you'll enjoy.
- **Never lose hope.** Even if you're struggling today, that doesn't necessarily mean you will struggle tomorrow.

## Exercise

Exercise improves your feeling of well-being and helps your level of activity and independence. COPD exercises come in three varieties: stretching, aerobic, and strength.

### 1. STRETCHING

Stretching helps keep your muscles flexible and relaxed, and lets your joints move more freely. Stretching improves your flexibility and mobility. It's an excellent method of warming up before exercising and cooling down after a workout.

### 2. AEROBIC EXERCISE

Aerobic exercise improves how your heart, lungs, and blood vessels work. This helps your body use oxygen more efficiently. Aerobic exercises include easy and enjoyable daily activities, such as walking, swimming, stair climbing, and dancing.

### 3. STRENGTH EXERCISE

Strength exercises use resistance to make your muscles stronger. Strength exercises can be done without weights. Exercises can include leg and arm extensions, leg lifts, and even lifting groceries or doing housework.

**ALWAYS CONSULT YOUR DOCTOR BEFORE STARTING AN EXERCISE PROGRAM.**

Determine the best exercise routine for you and whether you should use supplemental oxygen or medical supervision during your workouts.



### **Keep it Simple**

Set simple, achievable fitness goals. Walking for 10 minutes without becoming breathless is a good first goal. Exercises are most effective when done safely and on a regular basis.

Avoid exercising outdoors if pollution levels are high or the weather is too cold, too hot, or too humid. If possible, plan to exercise indoors on those days.

Plan for indoor workouts, such as walking in a well-ventilated mall. If you are going out dancing, check whether the venue is smoke-free.



## Nutrition

Most people are surprised to learn that the food they eat may affect their breathing. Your body uses food as fuel for all of its activities. The right mix of nutrients in your diet can help you breathe easier. No single food will supply all the nutrients you need—a healthy diet has lots of variety.

### 4 TIPS FOR HEALTHY EATING WITH COPD

Maintaining good nutrition on top of dealing with this condition doesn't have to be boring or difficult. Just follow these healthy diet tips:

#### 1. AVOID BREATHLESSNESS WHILE EATING

Try eating smaller meals more often throughout the day. Instead of 3 big meals a day, try 6 mini-meals.

If you are on oxygen, keep using it while you eat. Your body uses oxygen to provide the energy you need to eat and digest your food.

#### 2. SKIP THE SALT

Health Canada recommends foods from each food group that are lower in sodium and preparing foods with little or no added salt.

Choose fresh, unprocessed foods to eat or prepare at home instead of packaged, convenience foods.

#### 3. AVOID WEIGHT LOSS

Being underweight or experiencing abnormal weight loss with COPD can result in loss of muscle mass—including muscles that help you breathe.

Eating healthy snacks throughout the day can help you maintain your energy level without having to digest a larger meal.

If you need to gain weight, consider eating healthy foods that can increase and support proper muscle development.

Your doctor or a registered dietitian can advise you which high protein and high calorie foods are best suited for you.

## 4. CONSIDER NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS

Adding nutritional supplements may be needed if you can't get all the nutrition you need by food alone.

To maintain a healthy weight, try vitamin-fortified high-protein drinks, which are sold in pharmacies.

Always discuss dietary options and supplements with your doctor before changing your dietary habits.

### The Takeaway

Many people are surprised to learn that diet can have an impact on their breathing. Planning healthy meals and snacks and eating well can help you manage your symptoms and minimize complications.





## Hand Washing and COPD

Proper hand washing is the most effective way to protect yourself against a number of infectious diseases, including the flu and common cold.

Hand washing not only helps prevent you from getting sick, but it also reduces the risk of infecting others.

**Even clean-looking hands may be carrying germs.**

### 6 STEPS TO PROPER HAND WASHING

1. Remove any hand or arm jewellery.
2. Wet your hands with warm water.
3. Use soap and rub your hands together, ensuring you have lathered all surfaces for at least 15 seconds. Wash the front and back of your hands, as well as between your fingers and under your nails.
4. Rinse your hands thoroughly under warm running water, using a rubbing motion.
5. Wipe and dry your hands gently with a paper towel or a clean towel. Drying them vigorously can damage the skin.
6. In public restrooms, use a paper towel to turn off the tap to avoid re-contaminating your hands. Use the paper towel to open the door when you leave.

**Use alcohol-based hand rubs when soap and water are not available.**



# Flu Vaccinations

?

**Should I skip my flu vaccination if I'm taking COPD medications?**

**No, you should not skip your flu vaccination if you are taking COPD medications. Talk to your doctor about getting your flu vaccine.**

Vaccinations are your best protection against illnesses such as the flu.

The Canadian Lung Association recommends that most people with COPD should get a flu vaccine every year.

## YOUR COPD ACTION PLAN

An action plan is a written set of instructions from your doctor. It explains what medication you should be taking when you feel well and how to increase your medication if your breathing problems get worse. It can help take the guesswork out of important decisions as they arise.

We have provided a blank action plan in this pamphlet on page 20. We encourage you to complete the plan with your doctor.



## **COPD Flare-Ups**

COPD flare-ups (also called exacerbations) are times when:

- Your symptoms become noticeably worse for 48 hours or more
- When new symptoms develop

Recognizing the signs and symptoms of COPD flare-ups and seeking appropriate medical attention is key to responding to them.

## **8 SIGNS OF A COPD FLARE-UP**

1. An unusual increase in shortness of breath.
2. Yellow, green, or brown phlegm.
3. Increased amount, thickness, or stickiness of phlegm.
4. High temperature or fever.
5. Swollen ankles.
6. Need to sleep sitting up rather than lying down.
7. Trouble sleeping, morning headaches, and dizziness.
8. Feeling sick.

If you notice any of these symptoms, follow the steps in your written COPD Action Plan.

If you don't have a written Action Plan, ask your doctor for one. Your doctor can also help fill it out with you. If you still don't know what to do or if your symptoms are getting worse, call your doctor. If you can't reach your doctor, go to the hospital emergency department.

## Avoiding COPD Flare-Ups

Avoiding COPD flare-ups is important in managing your condition. Though many things can trigger a COPD flare-up, not everyone with COPD has the same triggers. Your triggers will be unique to you.

## Tips for Preventing COPD Flare-Ups

- Take care of yourself. This includes eating healthy foods, exercising regularly, and getting enough sleep.
- Wash your hands properly and often. This will reduce your chance of picking up germs and getting sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. This is how many people catch colds, flu, and other contagious respiratory (lung) infections.
- Be sure to take all of the medications as prescribed by your doctor. Ask for help if you have questions about your medications or what they're for.
- Avoid triggers that can make your COPD worse, such as air pollution, cold or humid air, and tobacco smoke.

**If you do experience a COPD flare-up, follow your written COPD Action Plan.**

## Travel

Feeling worried about travelling with COPD is completely understandable. However, enjoying your favourite activities can help people with COPD live a fuller, active lifestyle. Whether you use supplemental oxygen or not, you can enjoy taking a vacation.

### TRAVEL TIPS

#### See Your Doctor

Before heading out on your trip, call your doctor and schedule an appointment to talk about travelling. Here are some questions you can ask:

- Is it safe for me to travel?
- Do you have any travel tips for me?
- What about higher elevations? Will my oxygen requirements change?
- Can you recommend a doctor and hospital near where I'm going?

#### Plan Ahead

When seeking a COPD-friendly destination and the best weather for COPD, temperatures should be generally mild, whether leaning hot or cold.

Stock up on your COPD medications. If you're flying, keep your medications in your carry-on luggage. If you use supplemental oxygen, plan to bring more oxygen tanks and extra nasal cannulas than you'll need. It's best to have more than you need than not enough.

**For detailed instructions on travelling with medical oxygen, please visit [www.lung.ca](http://www.lung.ca) or call 1-888-566-LUNG (5864).**



## Travel Together

Consider travelling with a spouse, a friend, or a loved one. When you travel with a companion, you'll be with someone who knows your needs and is aware of your medical history. Plus, you'll feel more at ease and enjoy your vacation with someone you care about.

## Stress Relief

Stress and anxiety can make you feel short of breath and cause your COPD symptoms to worsen. Shortness of breath can lead to even more anxiety, faster breathing, and fear. While stress is part of daily life, you can learn to manage it. Learning to relax can help you prevent shortness of breath and avoid panic. Here are some ways to manage stress:

### Stress Relief Techniques

**Reduce stressors.** Try to avoid situations that you know trigger stress.

**Relaxation exercises.** Learn how to do some simple relaxation exercises like meditation and deep breathing exercises. These exercises combine deep breathing with releasing of muscle tension and can also help clear negative thoughts. If you practice these exercises regularly, you can use them, when needed, to lessen the negative effects of stress.

**Sleep well.** Good sleep habits are important for energy and coping with stress. Some tips include: not going to bed until you're tired, avoiding caffeine and naps, and not looking at TVs and digital devices in the bedroom. Try and develop a specific bedtime ritual that you stick to.

**Get support.** The support of family and friends is key. Social support is the single most important buffer against stress.

## Doctor's Visit Checklist for Experienced COPD Patients

Your COPD will change over time. A visit to your doctor is an excellent opportunity to review and possibly adjust your COPD management program:

- ☐ Bring your COPD Action Plan and review it with your doctor.
- ☐ Update your doctor about recent COPD symptoms and whether they've changed since your last visit.
- ☐ Discuss whether your medication dosages need adjustment.
- ☐ Ask your doctor to review your inhaler or device technique for taking your medication(s).
- ☐ Discuss whether you need a referral to a certified COPD educator or a COPD specialist.

## Take the COPD Assessment Test (CAT)

The CAT is an 8-item, patient-completed questionnaire that will help you measure the impact COPD is having on your well-being and daily life.

Your answers can be used by you and your healthcare professional to help improve the management of your COPD.

To take the COPD Assessment Test, visit  
**[www.catestonline.org/english/indexEN.htm](http://www.catestonline.org/english/indexEN.htm)**

## Your COPD Action Plan

Bring a copy of the COPD Action Plan to your doctor who can fill it out with you. Review the form with your doctor so that you understand how to use it.

Your written COPD Action Plan can help you respond to flare-ups and other changes in your condition. It can help take the guesswork out of important decisions as they arise.

Keep it handy. Update it with your doctor. Refer to it often.

### **REMEMBER:**

1. Take your regular medication as prescribed.
2. Do not wait more than 48 hours after the beginning of a COPD flare-up to start your antibiotic and prednisone.
3. Make sure when you start an antibiotic that you completely finish the treatment.
4. Quitting smoking and ensuring that your vaccinations are up to date (influenza annually, pneumococcal at least once) will help prevent future flare-ups of your COPD.



## Plan of Action for:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

This is to tell me how I will take care of myself when I have a COPD flare-up.

My goals are \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

<b>My Symptoms</b>	<b>I Feel Well</b>
I have sputum.	My usual sputum colour is: _____
I feel short of breath.	When I do this: _____
<b>My Actions</b>	<b>Stay Well</b>
	I use my daily puffers as directed.
	If I am on oxygen, I use _____ L/min.

The action plan is a written contract between you and your doctor to give you firm direction in how you will manage your COPD flare-ups. This action plan will help you and your caregivers to quickly recognize and act to treat your flare-ups. This will keep your lungs and you as healthy as possible.

A COPD flare-up is most commonly characterized by changes in your sputum and/or an increase in your shortness of breath. It can sometimes occur after you get a cold or flu, get (or feel) run down or are exposed to air pollution. They may also occur during changes in the weather. Before or during a flare-up you may notice changes in your mood such as feeling down or anxious. Some people have low energy or fatigue before and during a COPD flare-up. Flare-ups cause symptoms, which include cough, wheezing, sputum, and shortness of breath.

Your flare-up action plan is to be used only for COPD flare-ups. Remember there are other reasons you may get short of breath such as pneumonia or heart problems. If you develop shortness of breath and you do not have symptoms of a COPD flare-up, see a doctor.

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My support contacts are:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number

### I Feel Worse

Changes in my sputum, Yes ☐  
for **at least** 2 days. No ☐

OR

More short of breath than Yes ☐  
usual for **at least** 2 days. No ☐

### Take Action

If I checked 'Yes' to one or both of the above, I use my **prescriptions** for COPD flare-ups.

I use my daily puffers as usual. If I am **more** short of breath than usual, I will take \_\_\_\_ puffs of \_\_\_\_\_ up to a **max.** of \_\_\_\_ times per day.

I use my breathing and relaxation methods as taught to me.  
I pace myself to save energy.

If I am on oxygen, I will increase it from \_\_\_\_ L/min to \_\_\_\_ L/min.

### I Feel Much Worse

My symptoms are not better after taking my flare-up medicine for 48 hours.

I am very short of breath, nervous, confused and/or drowsy, and/or I have chest pain.

### Call For Help

I will call my support contact and/or see my doctor and/or go to the nearest emergency department.

### I will dial 911.

**Important information:** I will tell my doctor, respiratory educator, or case manager **within 2 days** if I had to use any of my flare-up prescriptions. I will also make follow-up appointments to review my COPD Action Plan twice a year.

## This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no text or other markings on the paper.





## GET MORE INFORMATION ON COPD

COPD education, support, and resources are widely available to help you when you need them.

### **The Lung Association**

[www.lung.ca](http://www.lung.ca)

### **Living Well with COPD**

[www.livingwellwithcopd.com](http://www.livingwellwithcopd.com)

### **COPD Canada**

[www.copdcanada.info](http://www.copdcanada.info)