

# Understanding COPD Flare-Ups

Despite your best efforts, your COPD symptoms can worsen. This is known as a flare-up, or exacerbation of your condition.

When a flare-up gets out of control many times you may have to go the hospital to be treated but there are steps that you can take to keep a flare-up from getting out of control.

These steps are: spotting changes in your symptoms early, knowing the right actions to take and who to call for help.

You may wonder what causes flare-ups?

In most cases, flare-ups develop from a lung infection.

Also, they can develop from a change in your pulmonary illness, environmental changes, exposure to irritants like strong odors or pollen.

Or a flare-up can also be a sign that your treatment plan needs adjusting.

Since lung infections are the leading cause of flare-ups, you should regularly check for signs of a developing infection.

One sign of infection is the color and consistency of your mucus.

Look at the mucus you spit out from your lungs every day.

Mucus that is free from infection is watery and clear, or white.

Infected mucus can be yellow, brown, green, or have streaks of blood in it.

If your mucus appears to be infected call your doctor.

Also call your doctor or if you have any of the following symptoms: fever; chills; increased shortness of breath; an increase in the amount of mucus or change in the color of mucus; increased coughing; and chest pain.

*"You just have to stay ahead or on top of it to know that, you know anything you do or ask or whatever has got to help."* – Michael, Patient

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There are steps you can take to limit the number of infections you get.

Many infections are picked up through people or things we touch, so wash your hands often.

You should also avoid contact with people who have colds, flu or other infections.

Get vaccinated for flu and pneumonia.

Check with your doctor to see when these shots are available.

The earlier you can spot and treat a lung infection, the more likely you are to avoid some of the more serious complications of a pulmonary illness, including pneumonia and hospital stays.

However not all flare-ups are due to a lung infection.

Changes in your breathing, becoming more short of breath, and extreme tiredness should be reported to your healthcare provider right away.

Depending on the severity of your symptoms your healthcare provider may be able to treat your condition at home, at the office, or have you go the hospital.

If you have a slight change in symptoms while at home, make a note of it. Bring it to your next appointment and share it with your healthcare provider.

There might be changes in your medication plan that your healthcare provider can make to lessen or eliminate your symptoms.

You may want to develop a written Flare-Up action plan with your healthcare provider before a flare-up happens.

One part of the plan is identifying your early warning signs of a flare-up.

Everyone's warning signs are not the same. So learn your warning signs and make that part of your plan.

This plan may include a list of things to avoid that could aggravate your condition.

The second action you need to know is what steps to take when symptoms appear. It could be performing breathing techniques, taking medications, or knowing who to call.

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*"And my mucus is yellow, and I feel really sick. I'm definitely coming down with something."*

Also, never be afraid to go to the emergency room, or call 911.

Call 911 right away if: You have increased difficulty breathing, your breathing is fast or rapid, your heartbeat is fast, you cough up blood, your lips or fingernails turn blue or grey, or you have chest pain.

Prompt treatment can prevent a rapid decline in your condition.

Everyone at some time or another will have a COPD flare-up.

*"There are just times when it's going to progressively hit you and put you back on your butt. But as soon as you feel something, listen to your body."* – Marilyn, Patient

Take the steps needed to spot changes in your symptoms early, and know what to do.