

# COPD\* EXACERBATIONS: FACTS AND TIPS FOR BETTER MANAGEMENT OF FLARE-UPS

\*COPD: chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

# COPD EXACERBATIONS: WHEN THE DISEASE PROGRESS

## UNDERSTANDING COPD EXACERBATIONS IS AN EXACERBATION?

Exacerbation of COPD (also called flare-ups) are event characterised by a worsening of your respiratory symptoms (cough, sputum and shortness of breath) beyond daily variations. It is not just a **'bad day'** and without proper management these episodes can accelerate the progression of the disease.



### Classification of COPD Exacerbations

#### Mild

The symptoms increase but are controlled at home with adjusting inhaled treatment.

#### Moderate

The symptoms require additional treatment such as oral antibiotics and/or corticosteroids – this can be referred as rescue packs.

#### Severe

The symptoms result in A & E visit or being admitted to hospital. It is a medical emergency.

## WHAT FACTORS CAN TRIGGER THEM?



**Respiratory  
infections**



**Inhaling irritants  
such as tobacco smoke  
or air pollution**



**Stopping or not using your  
maintenance therapies  
as recommended**

- *It's important to avoid these triggers when possible and to talk to your doctor if you notice your breathing is getting more difficult. Each person may have different triggers.*
- *Always consult your healthcare professional if you experience a noticeable worsening of your symptoms.*

# A RISK FOR THE FUTURE

## WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF A COPD EXACERBATION?

COPD exacerbation can lead to:



**A deterioration of  
lung function**



**An increase in the risk of  
hospitalisations**



**A progression of the  
disease**



**Sometime, it only takes one single exacerbation for  
respiratory function to decline.**

**Speak to your doctor if you experience  
exacerbation**



# SIGNS NOT TO IGNORE

## WHAT SIGNS SHOULD ALERT YOU?

Reach out to your doctor when...



... You are short of breath, your breathing is wheezing and your condition deteriorates rapidly.



... Your cough is more severe than usual.



... You are coughing more sputum or it changes in colour.



... You have persistent or unusual chest pain.



... your ankles or legs beginning to swell.



...Your treatment seems less effective than before.

- Exacerbations can mean that your COPD is not controlled on your current management plan.
- Keep a record of exacerbations to discuss with your doctor or COPD nurse.

This may not be a comprehensive list of signs and symptoms of a COPD exacerbation. Always consult your healthcare professional if you experience any of these symptoms, as they can help determine the cause.

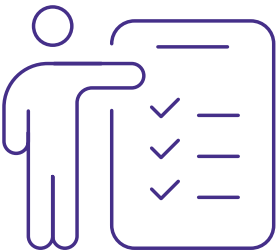
# CREATE YOUR SELF-MANAGEMENT PLAN



Set up with your doctor, the self-management plan allows you to recognise the symptoms of an exacerbation and anticipate its management.

It indicates the course of action to take in case of exacerbation.

## YOUR SELF-MANAGEMENT PLAN ALLOWS YOU:



- Recognise the signs and symptoms of flare-ups
- Adjust your treatment to the symptom you experiences
- Know when to call your doctor or go to emergency services.

You can use Asthma + Lung UK Self-mangement plan accessible to download for free on their website: [www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/conditions/copd-chronic-obstructive-pulmonary-disease](http://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/conditions/copd-chronic-obstructive-pulmonary-disease)

**Don't wait, agree a plan with your doctor or nurse so you know what to do if you have a flare-up.**

**If you have any concerns about your symptoms, please talk to your healthcare professional for further advice. If you experience severe breathlessness, seek immediate medical assistance calling 999.**



# A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO HELP MANAGE EXACERBATIONS.

**With the help of healthcare professionals, what can you implement to help prevent progression of your COPD?**



## STOP SMOKING

Regardless of the stage of the disease, quitting smoking is the most important step you can take to protect your lungs and slow down COPD. Your care team can support you with advice, tools, and treatments to help you quit for good. Here are some key points:

- **Don't worry if you can't quit immediately:** Seek help from a healthcare professional.
- **Your doctor or local Stop Smoking Service is there to support you:** They can advise and guide you throughout the process. In fact, with professional or expert help, you're 3 times more likely to quit for good. **You can find a local stop smoking support service on [www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/](http://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/)**
- **Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)** comes in various forms and can help you control your urge to smoke.
- Download and get a free personal Quit plan from the NHS on the Better Health website or reach out to patient organization such as Asthma + Lung UK so they can point you in the right directions

**Remember, you are not alone in this process! Professional support and various resources are available to help you succeed in quitting smoking.**



## FOLLOW YOUR LONG TERM-TREATMENT

**Using your inhalers and medications correctly helps make breathing easier.**

Inhalers are the main treatment for COPD that deliver medicine directly to your lung. Some people may have inhalers that combine medicines together.

Proper use of the inhalers is essential for maximum benefits. It is also crucial to follow the recommendations of your doctor regarding the administration of your treatment.

Regularly check your inhaler technique with your nurse or local pharmacist. For additional support, watch helpful inhaler technique videos on the Asthma and Lung UK website.



## PREVENT INFECTIONS / GET VACCINATED

Respiratory infections commonly trigger COPD symptoms and may cause exacerbations increasing your chance to become seriously ill.

Protect yourself by:

- Getting recommended vaccines (flu, pneumonia or COVID-19) - they are usually free for people with COPD and are the best way to lower your risk.
- Practicing prevention against other infections like colds or sinus infections by washing hands frequently, avoiding sick people and crowds, and wearing a mask in large gatherings. Additionally, dress warmly and limit exposure to cold weather as temperature changes can also trigger symptoms.



## ENGAGE IN SUITABLE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OR UNDERGO PULMONARY REHABILITATION

Staying active helps you breathe better, feel stronger, and enjoy everyday life. You may be referred to a Pulmonary rehabilitation programme where you'll learn safe exercises and get advice from a specialist team.

Keeping active with COPD, as recommended by your healthcare professional can make a difference. It can help:

- Reduce Breathlessness
- Improve how the body uses oxygen
- Prevent your body from getting used to doing less

Speak to your doctor on how you can increase your activity level and find the activity that suits you the best.

Consider exploring our Let's Dance Programme online by either scanning the QR code, or visiting [www.livingwithcopd.com/uk/lets-dance](http://www.livingwithcopd.com/uk/lets-dance). These dance routines have been developed especially for people living with COPD by pulmonary rehabilitation specialists and choreographers - with additional input from our campaign ambassador, Shirley Ballas, designed to help you increase your daily movement at home while having fun.



***Please ensure you talk to your healthcare team to determine whether this level of physical activity is suitable for you.***



## LOOK AFTER OTHER HEALTH CONDITIONS & FOLLOW YOUR SELF MANAGEMENT PLAN

COPD often occurs alongside other health issues like heart problems, diabetes, or anxiety.

Each condition can affect how you feel and breath, so it is important to work with your doctor on creating a plan that consider all your health needs.

You can make sure you have regular check-ups to monitor your conditions, and you share any new symptoms or concerns with your doctor.

Remember: You're not alone in this journey. Your healthcare team is here to help you manage all aspects of your health, with the goal of helping you breathe easier and feel better overall.



# LIVING WITH COPD



To know more about COPD,  
scan the QR code or visit  
[www.livingwithCOPD.com/uk](http://www.livingwithCOPD.com/uk)

## HOW TO EVALUATE THE CONTROL OF MY COPD?

This simple and quick test allows you to evaluate your COPD symptoms.

Take the test regularly to identify any changes and share your result with your doctor during your next consultation.



Take the test, scan the QR code or visit  
<https://www.livingwithcopd.com/uk/self-assessment-test>

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