

What you should know after a COPD flare-up



What is a flare-up?

People with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) can sometimes experience a flare-up (also called an exacerbation). That's when breathing symptoms worsen for two days or more. Flare-ups can be serious, sometimes leading to a hospital stay.

If you have had a flare-up, know that you are not alone. Flare-ups are common to many people with COPD, and are a leading cause of hospitalization in the United States.

Now that you've experienced a flare-up, read on to find out what causes them, and learn what you can do to help prevent another.



What can cause a flare-up?

COPD flare-ups are episodes when you may develop new symptoms or feel your usual symptoms get worse. Most flare-ups are caused by a lung infection, usually the common cold.

There are other triggers that can irritate your lungs and lead to flare-ups. What's in the air you breathe is important, especially for people with COPD.

It's also important to take your medicines as prescribed. Maintenance medicines should be taken every day, even when you're feeling well. Some are proven to help reduce the risk of flare-ups.

Reach out to your healthcare provider if your symptoms worsen, or if you have new symptoms. There may be an underlying problem. Or, your healthcare provider may want to review your current treatment plan.



Check the weather before you head out

The weather report can give you information on the air quality in your area. If it's bad, try to limit your time outdoors.

And when you leave home, make sure you have your rescue inhaler with you. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have not been prescribed one.

Handwashing, especially during cold and flu season, is one of the best ways to avoid illness.

What you should know after a COPD flare-up



What can trigger a flare-up?

Weather

Very hot or cold weather can cause your symptoms to flare up. So can high humidity.

Allergies

Animal dander, dust, and pollen are common allergies. They are also present in the air you breathe.

Pollution

You may know about outdoor weather pollutants, like smog and ozone. But indoor air quality matters too. Avoid tobacco smoke and woodburning fires.

Germ

COPD can make you more prone to infections. And infections can lead to flare-ups.

Irritants

COPD can make your lungs more sensitive to certain chemicals. Some household cleaning products can irritate your lungs. Bleach and ammonia are potential triggers.

Physical, emotional, and mental health

Your immune system may not be as effective when you are feeling run down. Stress and anxiety can also affect your immune system.

Each new flare-up can increase your chances of having another one. That's why it's important to know what can cause them, and about ways to limit your exposure to triggers.

Know your COPD triggers

Think about your most recent flare-up and answer these questions. You may want to discuss your answers with your healthcare provider.

What could have contributed to your flare-up or made it worse?



What have you learned that might help prevent triggers in the future?
