

# COPD Flare-up (Exacerbation)

A chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) flare-up (exacerbation) occurs when your COPD symptoms suddenly become worse, and you become sick. These flare-ups are usually caused by an infection in your lungs, changes in weather, increased air pollution, or exposure to smoke. Being run down or feeling stressed or anxious may also cause a flare-up.

## Warning Signs

The following signs and symptoms of a COPD flare-up may last 2 days or more and are stronger than your usual symptoms. They may also get worse and won't go away.

- Noisy breathing or wheezing sounds
- Coughing, sometimes with more mucus than usual or a change in the color of your mucus
- Increased shortness of breath and trouble catching your breath
- Not being able to take deep breaths
- Fever
- Unusual tiredness
- Difficulty sleeping
- New or increased swelling in the legs
- Morning headaches
- Gray or pale skin
- Blue or purple lips or nail tips

If you are having more shortness of breath and coughing than usual (COPD Action Plan **yellow zone**) or experiencing wheezing or chest tightness at rest (COPD Action Plan **red zone**), start taking the medications in your COPD Rescue Pack immediately.

## What to Do

If you have entered the **yellow zone** or **red zone**, **immediately begin to follow your COPD Action Plan**. This includes taking all medications prescribed by your doctor or advanced practice provider (APP)\* for flare-ups (quick-relief inhalers, COPD Rescue Pack including steroids or antibiotics, anti-anxiety medicines, or medicine through a nebulizer).

1. Start your COPD Rescue Pack if you have been prescribed one.
2. Call your doctor, APP, or care manager right away.
3. Continue use of existing prescribed medications.



It's important not to wait too long to start rescue medications. If you think you may be having a flare-up but are not sure, contact your doctor, APP, or care manager right away.

## When to Call Your Doctor, Advanced Practice Provider or Care Manager

If you are having a flare-up (exacerbation), your symptoms do not get better or your symptoms keep getting worse, call your doctor, APP, or care manager immediately.

## Call 911

If you need immediate help, please call 911.

\*An advanced practice provider is defined as a nurse practitioner or physician assistant.