Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (COPD)

Understanding COPD

Chronic obstructive lung disease (COPD) is a chronic condition that damages the lungs, getting worse over time. The disease causes persistent coughing, infections, fatigue and shortness of breath. If COPD is not treated, it can be life-threatening. The main cause of COPD is smoking. Non-smokers exposed to noxious particles or gases may also get COPD.

Symptoms of COPD include:

- Feeling short of breath (dyspnea) that is progressive, persistent and gets worse with exercise
- Chronic cough
- Bringing up mucous with cough

For more information on COPD, please read COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease).

Managing COPD

There are many treatments to help with COPD. You may be already taking medications. To learn more about managing COPD, see COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease). These topics also explain how specific therapies for COPD work:

- Breathing Problems: Using a Metered-Dose Inhaler
- Breathing Problems: Using a Dry Powder Inhaler
- Nebulizer for COPD Treatment
- Oxygen Treatment for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
- Oxygen Therapy: Using Oxygen at Home
- Pulmonary Rehabilitation for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
- Travelling with Oxygen

COPD Flare-Up Action Plan

Patients with COPD can experience exacerbations or flare-ups that can be serious and life-threatening. Knowing the symptoms and being prepared for handling flare-ups is an important part of managing COPD. A flare-up action plan can help to you and your health care provider recognize and treat a flare-up quickly. Your healthcare provider can help you identify COPD triggers so you can make the necessary lifestyle and environmental changes.

Consider keeping on updated COPD Flare-Up Action Plan on hand.

Symptoms of a flare-up may include:

- Rapid increase in cough
• Increased mucous especially if it is yellow or green
• Increased shortness of breath

For information on COPD flare-ups and how to handle them, please visit the following resources:

• COPD Flare-Ups
• COPD: Handling a Flare-Up
• COPD Flare-Up Action Plan

Immunizations

People with COPD are at higher risk for serious problems from certain vaccine-preventable diseases. It is recommended that people with COPD and their loved ones get vaccines to reduce the risk of these preventable diseases.

For more information about vaccines see:

• Influenza (Flu) Season
• Pertussis (Whooping Cough) (HealthLinkBC File #15c)
• Shingles vaccine Shingles Vaccine (HealthLinkBC File # 111)
• Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine (HealthLinkBC File #62b)
• Immunizations

Living with COPD

Some lifestyle and environmental factors can impact your physical health and worsen your COPD. Learn about lifestyle adjustments that can make to make living with COPD easier.

Smoking

Smoking is the main cause of COPD. The best way to slow down the severity of COPD is to quit or reduce smoking to help you improve the quality of life.

QuitNow provides one-on-one support and resources in multiple languages to help your strategy to quit. For more information visit:

• QuitNow.ca

The BC Smoking Cessation Program helps cover the cost of nicotine replacement therapy products and specific smoking cessation prescription drugs. For more information about the program see:

• BC Smoking Cessation Program

Physical Activity

Physical activity is one of the most important tools after quitting smoking for managing your COPD. Exercise helps to strengthen breathing muscles so you can breathe easier and feel better.
Physical Activity Services at HealthLinkBC can help you get started. Call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 and ask to speak to a qualified exercise professional Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm Pacific Time.

For more information see:

- [COPD: Using Exercise to Feel Better](#)

**Diet**

With COPD you may have less of an appetite or lower energy than you used to. You may feel too tired to make or eat food. Maintaining a healthy diet will help strengthen your body’s natural defense system.

Dietitian Services at HealthLinkBC can provide support. Call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 and ask to speak to a registered dietitian Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm Pacific Time.

For more information see:

- [COPD: Keeping Your Diet Healthy](#)
- [COPD: Avoiding Weight Loss](#)

**Environmental**

Poor air quality can cause COPD or make symptoms worse. Breathing chemical fumes, dust, second-hand smoke or air pollution over a long period of time may also damage the lungs.

- [Air Quality, Environment (HealthLinkBC Files)](#)
- [Wildfires and Your Health](#)

**Advance Care Planning**

Advance care planning is recommended for all patients with a diagnosis of COPD. Write down your wishes or instructions for present or future health care treatment in case you become unable to decide for yourself. For information and tools for starting a plan, see [Advance Care Planning](#).

**Useful Websites**

**BC Lung Association**

A non-profit and volunteer-based health charity that offers information on COPD programs and educational resources. You can speak to a certified respiratory educator for answers to questions on lung diseases and related matters. Call the Lung Association COPD Helpline: 1-866-717-2673 or visit their website.

- [BC Lung Association](#)

**The Canadian Lung Association:**

The Association provides information on treatment, medication and more for people with COPD. Their lung health search tool can help with finding services for managing COPD or help with quitting smoking.
• Canadian Lung Association

Your Health Authority

• Vancouver Coastal Health
  o Champion Lung Fitness Program. An education, exercise and social support program for people COPD and their families
  o Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Clinic. Provides education, counselling and guidance to help people have better confidence and control over COPD

• Fraser Health
  o COPD Self-Management Education. Provides education and tips on how to better manage COPD at home
  o Lung Health. Provides patient education, diagnosis confirmation and treatment of lung disease through a multidisciplinary team approach

• Interior Health
  o Breathe Well Program. Provides intensive, home-based respiratory care, education and case management for patients being discharged from hospital to help manage their COPD
  o Community Respiratory Therapy. Provides clinical support and self-management coaching to people with COPD and other conditions

• Island Health
  o Home Health Monitoring. Provides support to people with heart failure or COPD by helping them manage their condition from home
  o COPD Support Group. Provides support and information to people living with COPD

• Northern Health Authority
  o Chronic Disease Management Centre. Provides education resources, clinical management and support for COPD and other conditions. Support is available for their families, health care professionals and community members

Last Updated: April 10, 2019