



# Chronic obstructive lung disease (COPD)

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## Understanding COPD

Chronic obstructive lung disease (COPD) is a chronic condition that damages the lungs, getting worse over time. The disease can cause persistent coughing, infections, fatigue and shortness of breath. The leading cause of COPD is smoking, however non-smokers exposed to noxious particles or gases may also get COPD.

Symptoms of COPD include:

- Shortness of breath (dyspnea), especially during physical activities
- Chronic cough or wheezing
- Bringing up mucous with cough

For more information on COPD, visit [COPD \(chronic obstructive pulmonary disease\)](#).

## Managing COPD

There are treatments to help you with COPD. You may be already taking medications. Visit [COPD \(chronic obstructive pulmonary disease\)](#) to learn more about managing the 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](#)
- [Travelling with oxygen](#)

## COPD flare-up action plan

Patients with COPD can experience aggravations or flare-ups that can be serious and life-threatening. Knowing the symptoms and being prepared for flare-ups is important in managing your health.

Having a flare-up action plan is crucial for managing COPD. It can help you and your health care provider identify [COPD triggers](#) so you can make the necessary lifestyle and environmental changes.

Consider keeping the updated [COPD Flare-Up Action Plan](#) on hand.

Symptoms of a flare-up may include:

- A 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 manage them, visit:

- [COPD flare-Ups](#)
- [COPD: Handling a flare-up](#)
- [COPD Flare-Up Action Plan](#)

## **Immunizations**

People with COPD are at higher risk of severe problems from certain vaccine-preventable diseases. Vaccines can reduce the risk of these preventable diseases.

For more information about vaccines, visit:

- [Influenza \(flu\) season](#)
- [Pertussis \(whooping cough\) \(HealthLinkBC File #15c\)](#)
- [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 may worsen your COPD. Learn about lifestyle adjustments that can make living with COPD easier.

### **Smoking**

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

- QuitNow provides one-on-one support and resources in multiple languages to help your strategy to quit. For more information, visit their [Find Support](#) page
- 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, visit the [BC Smoking Cessation Program](#)

### **Physical activity**

Being physically active when you have COPD can help you breathe easier and feel better. Benefits of regular activity include reduced shortness of breath and risk of flare-ups as well as improved physical fitness and quality of life. To learn more about being active with COPD, visit:

- [Persons with lung conditions](#)
- [COPD: Using exercise to feel better](#)

Learn more about being active when you have COPD. Physical Activity Services at HealthLinkBC can provide support. To talk to a qualified exercise professional, call **8-1-1** (or 7-1-1 for the deaf and hard of hearing) toll-free in B.C. between 9 am and 5 pm Pacific Time, Monday to Friday.

### **Healthy eating**

With COPD, you may have lower energy levels or feel less hungry than you used to. You may feel too tired to make or eat food. Eating healthy can help you to meet your energy and nutrient needs, feel your best and stay strong. For more information, visit:

- [COPD: Keeping your diet healthy](#)
- [COPD: Avoiding weight loss](#)

Learn more about eating well when you have COPD. Dietitian services at HealthLinkBC can provide support. To talk to a registered dietitian professional, call **8-1-1** (or **7-1-1** for the deaf and hard of hearing) toll-free in B.C. between 9 am and 5 pm Pacific Time, Monday to Friday.

### **Environmental**

Poor air quality can cause COPD or make symptoms worse. Breathing chemical fumes, dust, second-hand smoke or air pollution over a prolonged time may also damage the lungs. For more information, visit:

- [Indoor air quality \(HealthLinkBC File #65a\)](#)
- [Particulate matter and outdoor air pollution \(HealthLinkBC File #65e\)](#)
- [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 information and tools for starting a plan, visit [Planning for advanced care](#).

## **Useful websites**

### **BC Lung Foundation**

A non-profit and volunteer-based health organization, which 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 BC Lung Foundation on 1-800-665-5864 or visit their [website](#).

### **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. For more information, visit:

- [Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease \(COPD\)](#)
- [The Canadian Lung Association home page](#)

## Your health authority

- Vancouver Coastal Health
  - [Champion Lung Fitness Program](#): an educational, exercise and social support program for people COPD and their families
  - [COPD Clinic at Gordon and Leslie Diamond Health Centre](#): provides education, counselling and guidance to help people have better confidence and control over COPD
- Fraser Health
  - [COPD Self-Management Program](#): provides education and tips on how to better manage COPD at home
  - [Lung Health](#): provides patient education, diagnosis confirmation and treatment of lung disease through a multidisciplinary team approach
- Interior Health
  - [Breathe Well Program](#): provides intensive, home-based respiratory care, education and case management for patients being discharged from hospital to help manage their COPD
  - [Community Respiratory Therapy](#): provides clinical support and self-management coaching to people with COPD and other conditions
- Island Health
  - [Home Health Monitoring](#): provides support to people with heart failure or COPD by helping them manage their condition from home
  - [Lung and respiratory health for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease \(COPD\)](#): provides comprehensive resource on COPD, a 30-second Lung Health Test, Better Breathers Clubs, and other exercise resources.

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For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit [www.HealthLinkBC.ca/more/resources/healthlink-bc-files](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/more/resources/healthlink-bc-files) or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca) or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.