

Breathing Easy Outlook

STAYING HEALTHY ■ LIVING WELL

WINTER 2009

What to Do When COPD Worsens

There are times when chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) symptoms flare up or worsen. Prompt treatment is critical to avoid serious illness or a hospital stay.

What causes a flare-up? Sometimes it's an infection or exhaustion. Air pollution or very hot or cold weather can trigger one, too. Know the warning signs so you can seek treatment. These include:

- Being more short of breath than normal
- Coughing up more mucus than usual
- Having mucus that's changed from its typical color to a yellow, green, or rust shade

If you experience any of these symptoms, call your doctor. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room if you:

- Have trouble coughing up

- sputum, or it contains blood
- Have difficulty breathing
- Feel confused, dizzy, or faint
- Have a fast or irregular heartbeat
- Have lips or fingernails that turn blue or gray

Since you know your body the best, only you can know when you may have a flare-up. Be aware of what you're coughing up and how you're breathing.



How Can I Reduce My Risk for GERD?

Frequent heartburn, called gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), occurs when acid in the stomach flows backward up the esophagus, causing burning in the chest or a sour taste in the mouth.

Some chronic conditions, like asthma and COPD, may worsen with GERD. It also can complicate treatment by mimicking symptoms of other problems. For example, GERD can cause chest pain, similar to a heart attack. If not controlled, GERD can lead to serious problems like esophageal cancer.

Help prevent GERD by managing your condition. If you experience heartburn, talk with your doctor. Lifestyle changes can help reduce symptoms. Try to:

- Elevate the head of your bed 6 to 10 inches.
- Avoid tight clothing.
- Eat small, frequent meals.
- Avoid foods and drinks that can trigger GERD, such as chocolate, citrus, spicy and fried foods, and coffee.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Don't smoke.

Good Health Guidelines

For people with COPD, it's important to make sure the following tests and vaccines are kept current:

- Flu vaccine
- Pneumonia vaccine

Be sure to talk with your health care provider about these topics:

- Writing an Action Plan
- Having a nutritional assessment
- Reviewing your exercise routine
- Taking part in a pulmonary education program
- Quitting smoking

A CLOSER LOOK

The Pneumonia Vaccine

People with lung disease are more likely to get pneumonia. That's why it's important to take steps to protect against it. You can lower your risk by getting a pneumonia vaccination. Health experts recommend a one-time pneumonia vaccination for people between ages 2 and 64 who have a chronic lung disease, such as COPD. If you're younger than age 65 and haven't been vaccinated, you'll need to get a shot. If you're age 65 or older, you should get a shot if you haven't been vaccinated before or it's been at least five years since the vaccination you received when you were younger than age 65. After that, no additional shots are needed.

Although these are suggested guidelines for care, please check with your benefits plan for coverage.

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Low-Cost Strategies that Work

Making positive choices in your everyday life about exercising, eating, and smoking can help you feel better, stay healthier, and breathe more freely. And you don't need to spend lots of money to make changes that will pay off.

No Gym Membership Required

Staying physically active is a top goal for people with COPD. Daily exercise builds strength, endurance, and stamina—and helps you breathe better. With regular physical activity, muscles use oxygen better, and your lungs don't have to work as hard.

Start by putting one foot in front of the other. Walking is one of the best exercises for people with COPD. Plus, it's free, requires no special equipment or gym membership, and you can do it at home. Here's your action plan:

- Ask your doctor about safe exercise.
- Start walking around your house—move outdoors as you feel comfortable.
- Walk daily for a few minutes at a time, resting in between. Try to walk longer and a little farther each day.

Eating Right Doesn't Have to Be Pricey

Good nutrition is critical for lots of reasons. It helps you maintain a healthy weight and gives you the vitamins and minerals needed to fight off infection. But you don't have to invest in pricey diets or health foods. Here are some healthy choices that won't empty your wallet:

- Skip the sodas, chips, cookies, and other expensive junk foods.
- Eat foods short on saturated fat, sugar, and salt, and long on nutrients. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products give you nutritional bang for your buck.
- Bring on the beans. As a cheap and versatile vegetable that does double duty as a protein, beans deserve a regular place at your table.



Go Smoke-Free to Fatten Your Wallet

The number one strategy for managing COPD is to quit smoking. It will help you breathe better, live longer, and save money—smoking is expensive. Fortunately, there's lots of free help for people who want to quit.

- Call a Quitline. All states run free telephone-based programs that link callers with trained counselors. The National Cancer Institute's Smoking Quitline at **877-448-7848** or the National Quitline at **800-QUITNOW (800-784-8669)** can help you plan a strategy for quitting.
- Check out the "Online Guide to Quitting" at www.smokefree.gov.
- Join a support group for quitters. Check with your employer, health insurance company, local hospital, or the American Lung Association to find one.

You may also want to check with your health plan benefits to see if there are programs to help you quit smoking.

Practice Better Breathing



You probably don't think of breathing as something you need to learn. But you may need help with this important function. When you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), you usually work very hard to breathe. Why? After inhaling, lungs damaged by the disease and weakened breathing muscles can't push all the old air out. As a result, lungs don't fill well the next time you try to inhale, and you need to breathe more frequently. Each in-breath takes more effort, so you feel out of breath even as you breathe more.

Steps to Help Yourself

The most common symptom of COPD is shortness of breath, which can be stressful. But by breathing properly and using special breathing techniques, you can improve the situation. Here are some tips that may help:

- Relax your shoulders, arms, hands, neck, and chest—being tense makes breathing harder.
- Ask your doctor about the best type of exercise for you. Keeping muscles strong will actually help you breathe better.
- Exhale during the most strenuous part of any activity. For example, exhale as you lift a grocery bag from the car.

Take Control with Belly Breathing

Controlling breath through special exercises is one of the best ways to combat breathlessness. Diaphragmatic breathing—also called belly breathing—strengthens the muscles needed to breathe. Stronger muscles are more efficient, so breathing takes less effort. Here's how to start:

1. Lie on your back with pillows under your head and knees, or sit comfortably in a chair.
2. Place one hand on your stomach, the other on your chest. Breathe in through the nose and allow the area around your waist to fill with air. Expand your belly. The hand on your chest should remain still, while the one on your stomach rises when you inhale.
3. As you breathe out slowly, without force or effort, use your hand to gently push inward and upward on your stomach.

Once you're comfortable breathing this way, practice belly breathing lying down with a 1-pound bag of beans or rice on your stomach. This will make the muscles you use to inhale even stronger. Use diaphragmatic breathing while lying down, sitting, standing, or walking.

Slow It Down with PLB

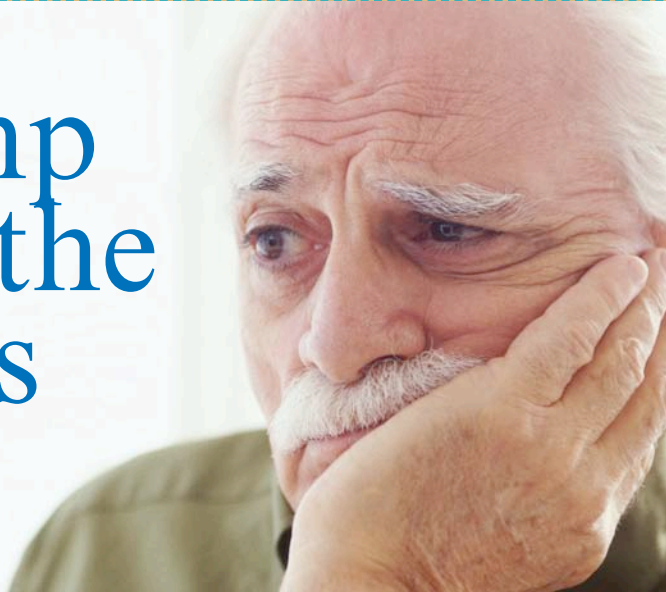
You can combine belly breathing with another breathing technique called pursed-lips breathing (PLB). People who have trouble emptying their lungs often turn to PLB. It slows exhalation, and studies show it may help strengthen breathing muscles and make breathing feel easier. Here's how to practice this technique:

1. Sit in a relaxed, comfortable position. Place your hands around the lower part of your ribs to remind you to fill the area around your waist with breath.
2. Take an easy breath in through your nose.
3. Slowly and gently exhale air out through pursed lips as if blowing into a whistle.
4. Keep a steady stream of air flowing through the center of your lips. Breathe out for at least twice as long as you inhale.

Make Time for Practice

Practice breathing techniques for a few minutes several times during the day for a total of 10 minutes a day. Once you've gotten the hang of them, use these breathing practices throughout the day. They can help you relax, prevent breathlessness during activity, and help conserve your energy.

Stamp Out the Blues



Feeling down in the dumps or sad is common. But feeling depressed all the time may actually worsen symptoms. Researchers studying the link between COPD and depression found depressed people have more flare-ups and go to the hospital more than those without depression.

Knowing the signs of depression can help you recognize when you need help:

- An empty or persistent sad or anxious feeling
- Loss of interest in things you used to enjoy
- Consistent lack of energy
- Eating more or less than usual
- Crying often or too much
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating, or remembering
- Sleep problems
- Feeling worthless, guilty, or hopeless
- Increased irritability
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide

If you are having symptoms of depression that last for more than two weeks, talk with your doctor.

Help yourself shake the occasional blues when they strike—or even prevent depression from occurring—by taking action. Strategies to keep the blues at bay include:

- Keeping up daily activities
- Visiting with friends or talking with them on the phone
- Having something to look forward to by planning activities you enjoy
- Volunteering
- Following an exercise plan from your doctor
- Using positive self-talk

Taking steps to handle depression can help you stay healthier and enjoy life again.



Diaphragmatic breathing. A breathing technique that can help strengthen breathing muscles. It helps focus attention on filling the stomach, rather than the chest, with air when taking deep breaths.

Esophagus. A tube that transports saliva, food, and liquid to the stomach from the mouth. If you eat something too hot or too cold, you might feel it moving through your esophagus.

Positive self-talk. A technique that involves talking to yourself—either out loud or, more commonly, in your head—that can help relieve stress and depression. An example of positive self-talk is “I can handle this if I take it one step at a time.”

Pulmonary arteries. The blood vessels that transport blood from your heart to your lungs. COPD can block or damage the pulmonary arteries, which can lead to pulmonary hypertension, or high blood pressure.



Making the Heart-Lung Connection

People with COPD may also develop heart problems when changes in the lungs force the heart to work harder. Pulmonary hypertension (PH)—high blood pressure in blood vessels that carry blood from the heart to the lungs—can lead to heart failure.

When pulmonary arteries become blocked or damaged as a result of COPD, they carry less blood. This makes it difficult for the heart to push blood through the arteries and into the lungs. Pressure in the arteries rises, and the result is PH.

Strain on the Heart

The right side of your heart pumps blood through the lungs to pick up oxygen. But the strain on the heart from PH makes it difficult to get blood to the lungs. This failure of heart’s right side is called cor pulmonale.

Symptoms of both PH and cor pulmonale include:

- Shortness of breath
- Tiredness or fatigue
- Chest pain
- Swelling in the feet or ankles
- Bluish tinge to lips, hands, or feet

Other symptoms of PH are dizziness and racing heartbeat. Symptoms are likely to be more evident during physical activity.

Living Better

While there’s no cure for PH or heart failure, oxygen and medication can help symptoms and slow the conditions’ progress. Other steps that can help:

- Call your doctor right away if symptoms worsen or change. Chest pain may require emergency treatment.
- Don’t stop or change medicines without talking with your doctor first.
- Check with your doctor before taking any over-the-counter medicines.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Call your doctor if you notice a sudden gain or loss.
- Quit smoking and avoid secondhand smoke.
- Follow the diet your doctor recommends.
- Keep muscles strong with regular exercise. Talk with your doctor about how much is safe.
- Use prescribed oxygen as recommended.

Rev Up Protein to Make and Keep Muscle

Eating right is very important for people with lung disease. Overstressed breathing muscles may use up to 10 times the energy healthy lung muscles do, and getting enough calories can be hard. Plus, if you don't eat sufficient protein, your body will actually break down muscle to get it. The result? You lose strength, and breathing muscles weaken further.

Several factors combine to produce muscle loss and weakness in people with COPD. They include:

- Weight loss
- Reduced physical activity
- Inflammation
- Steroid side effects

Whether you're underweight or overweight, or even at a healthy body weight, you can still lose muscle function if you don't eat a balanced diet with enough calories and protein. Here's what you need to know:

- Your body uses protein to make and maintain muscle.
- Eat protein daily—your body doesn't store it.
- Meat, poultry, eggs, low- and nonfat dairy products, nuts, and beans are good sources.
- If eating vegetable proteins, like beans and grains, combine them to get all the nutrients you need. An example would be black beans and brown rice.
- Try to get at least 50 to 65 grams of protein each day. That's about the amount in 4 ounces of meat and a cup of cottage cheese.
- Consider nutritional supplement drinks to add protein and calories if you need help combating weight and muscle loss.

Weight loss, muscle fatigue, or a drop in muscle strength may be signs you're not eating enough protein. If you have any of these symptoms, talk with your doctor.



Bow-Tie Pasta

Serves 6

Ingredients

- 1 bulb garlic, roasted
- 6 cups eggplant, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1/2 cup balsamic vinegar
- 4 tbsp. olive oil
- 1/4 tsp. dried oregano
- 1/2 tsp. fresh ground pepper
- 3 cups (about 3 medium) chopped tomatoes
- 1 package (12 oz.) large bow tie pasta, cooked
- 2 tbsp. fresh parsley
- 1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Directions

Separate roasted garlic cloves, peel, and set aside. In a bowl, combine eggplant, vinegar, 3 tbsp. olive oil, oregano, and pepper. Marinate in fridge for 1 hour. Place eggplant mixture on a baking pan. Bake at 425 degrees for 25 minutes. Stir every five minutes. Heat 1 tbsp. olive oil in skillet. Add tomatoes and garlic. Sauté for five minutes. Serve pasta with eggplant and tomato-garlic mixture. Top with parsley and Parmesan.

Per Serving

Calories 370, Total fat 11 g, Saturated fat 2 g, Cholesterol 5 mg, Sodium 65 mg, Total carbohydrate 58 g, Dietary fiber 5 g, Protein 11 g

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



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