



Staying Healthy and Avoiding Exacerbations

An acute exacerbation of COPD is a flare-up or episode when your breathing gets worse than usual and you become sick. It is most often linked to an infection. Exacerbations can be serious, causing you to call your health care provider, go to the emergency room, or stay overnight in the hospital. Having exacerbations often can actually cause your COPD to progress faster, so it's important to help prevent them as much as possible.

You can learn to avoid acute exacerbations by recognizing early warning signs and then taking action to stop them in their tracks! The best way to do this is to work with your health care provider on an action plan so you know what to do to treat an exacerbation before it becomes serious. Show your health care provider the following list of early warning signs and ask, "When do you want me to call you?"

Early warning signs of an acute exacerbation:

- Wheezing, or more wheezing than what's normal for you
- Coughing more than usual
- Shortness of breath that is worse than usual
- An increase in the amount of mucus
- Change in the color of your mucus to yellow, green, tan, or bloody
- Shallow or rapid breathing, more than what's normal for you
- Fever
- Confusion or excessive sleepiness
- Swelling in your feet or ankles

Here are some tips to help you avoid acute exacerbations:

- See your health care professional at your regularly scheduled appointment even if you feel fine
- Get your flu shot every year. Local pharmacies and grocery stores often offer these shots for free at the start of flu season
- Check if you are due for a pneumonia and pertussis shot
- Wash your hands often for 20 seconds with warm water and mild soap
- Carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer for when you cannot wash your hands
- Avoid touching your mouth, eyes, and nose in public to help prevent germs from entering your body
- Stay away from crowds, especially during cold and flu season
- Use your own pen, especially when signing in at your HCP's office or other health appointments
- Get plenty of sleep. When your body is tired, you're more likely to get sick
- Drink plenty of water. Thick sticky mucus is more likely to get stuck in your lungs and cause problems

It is possible to stay well, even if you have COPD, at any stage. Watch for early warning signs and don't ignore them. Work with your health care team to avoid acute exacerbations!

**For information regarding COPD,
please contact the COPD Foundation at
www.copdfoundation.org or
toll-free 1-866-316-COPD (2673)**

