

# How to Recognize COPD Flare-ups

Sometimes patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) may have symptoms that are worse than the usual “ups and downs” of good days and bad days. Your healthcare provider may call this a flare-up or an exacerbation. If you have a flare-up, you may need a change in your medicine or more medical treatment.

You can identify a flare-up by noticing changes in symptoms such as the following:

- Increased shortness of breath
- Changes in phlegm (mucus) – color and amount
- Increased coughing

Work with your provider to develop a COPD Action Plan that helps you plan ahead and helps manage changes in your symptoms.

STEP

1

## Identify Your Everyday Symptoms

People may experience their COPD in different ways. Knowing what is usual for you day to day will help you see changes and recognize flare-ups.

*Below, note how you tend to feel on a regular day when you are not having a flare-up. Check the circle that seems most like you.*

### Breathing:

Below are some activities that may lead to shortness of breath. Which of these activities usually make you feel breathless?



Strenuous exercise



Walking up a slight hill



Walking at my own pace on level ground



Walking a short distance or a few minutes on level ground



Dressing or undressing

### Mucus:

What is the usual color of your mucus?



Clear



White



Yellow



Green



Other

What is the usual amount of mucus you cough up? \_\_\_\_\_

### Cough:

How often do you cough?



Rarely



Sometimes



Every day



All day, every day

## 2

## Think About Your Flare-Ups

When managing your COPD, it can be helpful to think about challenges you have experienced during flare-ups. Talk to your provider about how you can manage flare-ups better in the future.

*Talk to your provider about the last time you had a flare-up.*

- What were you doing when the flare-up began? \_\_\_\_\_
- What symptoms did you notice first? \_\_\_\_\_
- What did you do about those symptoms? \_\_\_\_\_
- What worked? What didn't work? \_\_\_\_\_
- What could you do the next time you have a flare-up? \_\_\_\_\_

## 3

## Track How You Feel

Talk to your provider about what to do if your everyday symptoms change. Tracking changes in your symptoms can help you recognize when you may need to seek additional care to manage your COPD.



= My everyday symptoms have improved or are the same as described on the previous page.



= My symptoms have somewhat worsened from what I described on the previous page.



= **My symptoms have gotten much worse or have been worse for a long period of time. I need urgent medical care. (Call 911 or seek medical care immediately.)**

DAY				I FELT...	SO, BASED ON MY PROVIDER'S DIRECTIONS, I DECIDED TO...
Example		✓		more breathless at the grocery store	use my rescue inhaler and sit down to rest
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					

This chart can help you get started. Continue to track your symptoms to make it easier for you to recognize changes in those symptoms. Share this chart with your provider. Always follow your provider's recommendations.

Talk to your healthcare provider about developing a COPD Action Plan, and use this chart to track your everyday symptoms. Make sure you understand what to do if your symptoms change, and when it's time to seek emergency care.



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