

# Managing a COPD flare up

(Also sometimes called "an exacerbation")

## How do I know if I am having a flare up?

If your symptoms feel different, compare them to a normal day in the last 3 months. Be sure to act early if they are worse.

- **Phlegm** - has the amount, colour, stickiness, or thickness changed?
- **Breathlessness** - are you more breathless than usual when resting or walking?
- **Daily activity** - how much you can do. Is it less than normal?

## When should I use my rescue pack?

If you have 2 or more of these symptoms for 2 days nonstop:

- more breathlessness
- more coughing
- darker phlegm
- more phlegm
- feeling wheezy
- a tight chest

Only use your rescue pack if you need it. Taking it before you have symptoms, or just in case, can cause problems. Contact medical staff if you are unsure.

## Which medicine do I take?

That depends on the symptoms you have. Make sure to tell the doctor, nurse, or pharmacist at your GP's practice if you use your rescue medicine.

If you're more breathless, wheezy, or have trouble getting around due to breathlessness, take your steroid.

**Steroid**  
Prednisolone  
5-day course

<p>If your phlegm has increased, or turned yellow, green, thicker, or stickier, take antibiotics. Do not use antibiotics for white phlegm.</p> <p>Common antibiotics for COPD include Amoxicillin, Doxycycline, Co-trimoxazole, Co-amoxiclav, Clarithromycin.</p> <p>Please follow the instructions on the box.</p>	<p><b>Antibiotics</b> Usually 5 days</p>
<p>If you have both sets of symptoms, take both medicines.</p>	<p><b>Both</b></p>

You may need to call your doctor for a rescue pack. If you do, tell us which symptoms you have and which medicine you need.

## What if I don't feel better?

It can take 2 full days for your rescue medicine to start working. If your symptoms are not getting better in this time, tell your GP or respiratory nurse.

## When should I contact medical staff?

Get in touch with your GP, nurse, or pharmacist if you have:

- used your rescue medicine.
- worries that your condition is worse after taking your rescue medicine.
- more swelling than usual on your legs and ankles.
- more difficulty with daily tasks than usual.
- more problems with anxiety or panic than usual.

We can help you over the phone and tell you the next steps. This may mean managing your condition at home, coming in to see us for another assessment, or extra care.

Make sure to tell us about any flare ups when you come for your COPD review. If you have 3 or more flare ups in 12 months, we may make an appointment for you to speak with a specialist.

# Is there anything else I can do in a flare up?

There are some ideas below. Try practising them when you are well, so they will be easier when you are unwell.

## Using relaxation techniques

- think about a positive picture or place.
- keep your mind busy with something else.
- remind yourself this will pass, try to stay positive.
- use a fan or open a window to allow for a cool breeze.

## Use your blue inhaler (Salbutamol)

2 puffs are usually enough. Give 10 minutes for this to work. If it is a canister (MDI) then use a spacer.

If you are extremely breathless you can take up to 10 puffs. Do this 1 puff at a time with at least 30 seconds between each puff. If your breathing settles before 10 puffs, then stop. 10 puffs is like having a strong dose of salbutamol through a nebuliser machine.

To see inhaler demonstrations see the RightBreathe website at:  
[www.rightbreathe.com](http://www.rightbreathe.com)

## Use effective coughing

Put your head and arms on a pillow over a table to expand the chest. This will help the phlegm come up. You can practice this using this phlegm clearance video:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcScy9fmLDs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcScy9fmLDs)

## Slow down your breathing

Focus on belly breathing and long breaths out.

[www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/symptoms-tests-treatments/symptoms/breathlessness/how-can-i-manage-my-breathlessness](http://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/symptoms-tests-treatments/symptoms/breathlessness/how-can-i-manage-my-breathlessness)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3S9gEsa80E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3S9gEsa80E)

