



# Understanding Your Lung Health: COPD

## What is COPD?

**Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease**, or **COPD** is a group of lung diseases that make it harder to breathe and get worse over time. **Chronic bronchitis** and **emphysema** are the most common types of COPD.

**Anyone can develop COPD**, but people aged 40 or older and people who smoke or used to smoke have a higher risk of developing the disease. Secondhand smoke, air pollution, workplace exposures to dust, fumes and chemicals, and a genetic condition called alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency (AATD) are also causes and risk factors for COPD.

## Learn about COPD

When you are first diagnosed with COPD, it may be hard to know where to start your search for information. The Lung Association has the information and resources you need to manage, treat, find support and so much more! **Start your journey at [Lung.org/COPD](http://Lung.org/COPD).**

Our **Lung HelpLine** is staffed by expert registered respiratory therapists, registered nurses, and tobacco cessation counselors that can answer your lung health questions. **Contact the HelpLine for free at 1-800-LUNGUSA or [Lung.org/HelpLine](http://Lung.org/HelpLine).**

**COPD Basics** is a free, interactive online program to help you understand COPD. The course is ideal for people living with COPD, especially those with a new diagnosis. You will develop knowledge and skills to manage COPD, prevent and respond to exacerbations, and maintain a high quality of life while living with a chronic disease. **Take the course today at [Lung.training](http://Lung.training).**

**My COPD Action Plan**

Patients and healthcare providers should complete this action plan together. This plan should be discussed at each visit and updated as needed.

The green, yellow and red zones show symptoms of COPD. The list of symptoms is not complete. You may experience other symptoms. In the "Action" column, your healthcare provider will recommend actions for you to take. Your healthcare provider may write down other actions in addition to those listed here.

Green Zone: I am doing well today	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usual activity and exercise level</li> <li>• Usual amounts of cough and phlegm/mucus</li> <li>• Sleep well at night</li> <li>• Appetite is good</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Take daily medicines</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use oxygen as prescribed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Continue regular exercise/diet plan</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Avoid tobacco product use and other inhaled irritants</li> </ul>
Yellow Zone: I am having a bad day or a COPD flare	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More breathless than usual</li> <li>• I have less energy for my daily activities</li> <li>• Increased or thicker phlegm/mucus</li> <li>• Using quick-relief inhaler/mucolytic more often</li> <li>• More swelling in ankles</li> <li>• More coughing than usual</li> <li>• I feel like I have a "chest cold"</li> <li>• Poor sleep and my symptoms woke me up</li> <li>• My appetite is not good</li> <li>• My medicine is not helping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Continue daily medication</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use quick-relief inhaler every _____ hours</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Start an oral corticosteroid (prednisone, dexamethasone, and others)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Start an antibiotic (penicillin, amoxicillin, and others)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use oxygen as prescribed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Get plenty of rest</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use pursed lip breathing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Avoid secondhand smoke, e-cigarette aerosol, and other inhaled irritants</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Call provider immediately if symptoms do not improve</li> </ul>
Red Zone: I need urgent medical care	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Severe shortness of breath even at rest</li> <li>• Not able to do any activity because of breathing</li> <li>• Not able to sleep because of breathing</li> <li>• Fever or shaking chills</li> <li>• Feeling confused or very drowsy</li> <li>• Chest pain</li> <li>• Coughing up blood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Call 911 or seek medical care immediately</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> While getting help, immediately do the following:</li> </ul>

The information contained in this document is for informational purposes only. It should not be used as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. THE AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION does not recommend any medical device or service, including any particular COPD medication or treatment device. For more information, visit [Lung.org](http://Lung.org) or call 1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-558-5872) for more information. © 2016 American Lung Association

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## Find Support

The American Lung Association can help you find a local support group, connect with others online, and get the tools you need to manage your COPD.

### Patient Caregiver Network

Join our nationwide, online support program that provides direct access to lung disease management tools, education, and a connection to others living with lung disease. **Become a member at [Lung.org/PCN](https://www.lung.org/PCN).**

### Better Breathers Clubs

Attend an in person or virtual support group to learn ways to manage your COPD and get support from others. **Find a Club in your community at [Lung.org/better-breathers](https://www.lung.org/better-breathers).**



### Freedom From Smoking® Program

Freedom From Smoking is a virtual or in person tobacco cessation program that has helped more than a million Americans end their addiction to nicotine. **Join today at [Lung.org/FFS](https://www.lung.org/FFS).**

### Inspire Living with COPD Support Community

Build your support network and connect with others living with COPD. **Learn more about our online support communities at [Lung.org/community](https://www.lung.org/community).**