



# First steps to living with COPD

(chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)



[blf.org.uk/COPD](http://blf.org.uk/COPD)

# What is COPD?

**COPD** stands for **chronic obstructive pulmonary disease**.

- C** chronic = **it's a long term condition**
- O** obstructive = **it's hard for you to breathe**
- P** pulmonary = **it affects your lungs**
- D** disease = **it's a medical condition**

COPD does not go away. But your doctor, nurse and pharmacist can help you find ways to live well with it. And there are things you can do to help yourself too. Together you can stop it getting worse.

We have support for you:

Go to [www.blf.org.uk/COPD](http://www.blf.org.uk/COPD)

Or call our helpline on **03000 030 555**

## tip

It's a good idea to have a plan for looking after yourself with COPD. Make a plan with your doctor or nurse.

You can get a COPD plan from  
[www.blf.org.uk/copd-self-management-plan](http://www.blf.org.uk/copd-self-management-plan)

# Care for COPD

These ten things are important for your care. Put a tick ✓ by the ones you have done. **If you have some without ticks, ask your doctor about them.**

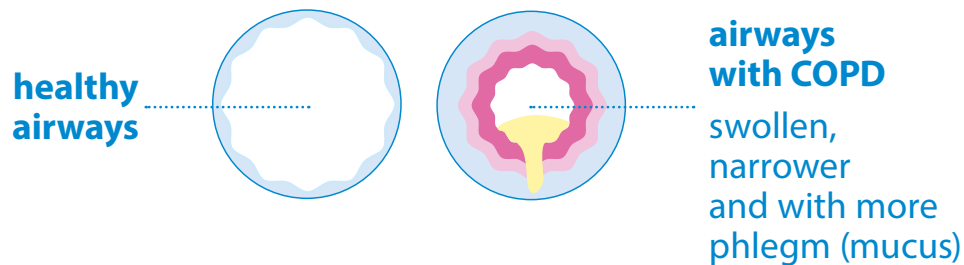
1. I had a breathing test called 'spirometry' to make sure I had COPD.	✓
2. I know what COPD is. I know where to get information if I need it.	✓
3. I get support for my COPD. I have a plan to help me manage my COPD.	✓
4. Every year I ask my doctor for a free flu jab. I have also had a one-off pneumonia jab and the coronavirus jabs.	✓
5. If I smoke, I speak to my doctor or nurse about stopping smoking.	✓
6. I know I must keep active and eat well.	✓
7. I have done pulmonary rehabilitation (PR). These are classes to help me exercise and learn about my COPD.	✓
8. I know why I take my medicines and inhalers and when to take them. My doctor or nurse checks how I use my inhaler once a year.	✓
9. I know what to do if my symptoms get worse.	✓
10. I see my nurse or doctor once a year or more. I talk to them about how I feel, my care and these 10 things.	✓

# My lungs

If you have COPD, you have damaged lungs. Your airways are narrow and this makes it hard for you to breathe in and out.

With COPD, the airways are narrowed because:

- » the lung tissue is damaged
- » phlegm (mucus) blocks the airways
- » the airways are red and swollen.



## How will I feel?

If you have COPD:

- » You may feel out of breath.
- » You may have a cough.
- » In cold weather, you might wheeze (make a whistling sound when breathing).
- » You might bring up phlegm (mucus).

# Inhalers

Your doctor may give you medicines in inhalers. You might be given a spacer (a large plastic container) to use with your inhaler.

Some inhalers open your airways. Some inhalers reduce the swelling in your airways.

Inhalers that work very quickly to help your breathing are called 'relievers'.



**You need to use your inhaler in the right way. This helps you get the best from your medicines.**

There are lots of different types of inhalers. Some inhalers work differently to others. Some are different colours. Usually you will have:

- » one or two inhalers that you take regularly (once or twice a day)
- » another inhaler to take when you need it (to help when your breathing is worse).

Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist to show you how to use yours. Have a look at the videos at

[www.asthma.org.uk/advice/inhaler-videos](http://www.asthma.org.uk/advice/inhaler-videos)

# What if I have a flare-up?

**A flare-up is when your COPD symptoms get suddenly worse. It's also called an 'exacerbation'.**

Your doctor might give you medicines to keep at home to help if you have a flare-up. This is sometimes called a rescue pack. This has tablets to use if you have a flare-up. Not everyone with COPD needs a rescue pack. If you don't have a rescue pack, check with your doctor to see if you need one.

You should make a flare-up plan with your doctor. This helps you to know what to do if you have a flare-up.



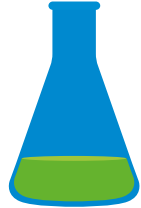

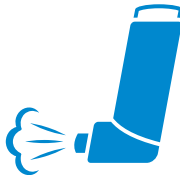


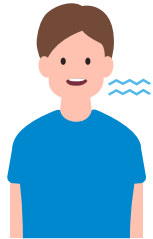
## **I will remember:**

- » to tell my doctor or nurse if I have a flare-up
- » to call 999 if I feel really bad.

If I use the medicines in my rescue pack, I will tell my doctor or nurse so they can keep track of my flare-ups. They can also give me new medicines to keep at home.

Get your flare-up action plan at  
[www.blf.org.uk/self-help](http://www.blf.org.uk/self-help)

Make a plan with your doctor or nurse, so you know what to do if you have a flare-up. Your plan could look like this:

<b>If I get:</b> 	<b>If I get:</b> 	<b>If I get:</b> 	<b>If I get:</b> 
more out of breath	more out of breath even though I've taken my reliever medicines	more phlegm (mucus) or it changes colour: dark yellow, green	more chesty coughing
<b>I will:</b> 	<b>I will:</b> 	<b>I will:</b> 	<b>I will:</b> 
use my reliever inhaler more	start my rescue pack - steroids	start my rescue pack - steroids and antibiotics	keep calm and use ways to control my breathing

# What you can do

## If you smoke, stop smoking

Stopping smoking is the most important thing you can do for your lungs. There's lots of support out there – it's easier to stop with help. [www.nhs.uk/smokefree](http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree)



## Control your breathing

If you feel breathless, get into a position that's good for you:



Like this



Or this



Or this

You can learn how to control your breathing. One way is slow deep breathing:

- » Relax your shoulders, arms and hands
- » Breathe in through your nose
- » Breathe out through your mouth
- » Try to relax each time you breathe out.

Ask your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist to find ways that work best for you. [www.blf.org.uk/breathlessness](http://www.blf.org.uk/breathlessness)

## When it's cold, stay warm

It's a good idea to prepare for cold temperatures, to make sure you stay well.

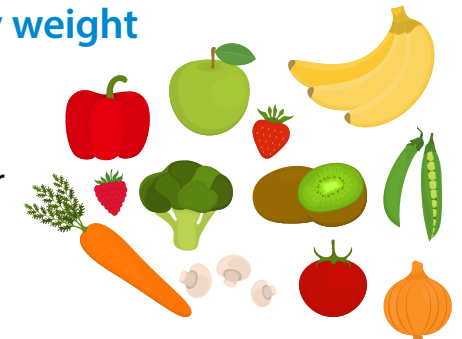
[www.blf.org.uk/cold-weather](http://www.blf.org.uk/cold-weather)



## Eat well and keep a healthy weight

Your diet can affect your COPD. Keep to a healthy weight for you to help your breathing. Your doctor or nurse can help you.

[www.blf.org.uk/eating-well](http://www.blf.org.uk/eating-well)



## Keep active

Keeping active helps your breathing. It gets you fitter so you can do more. Here are some things you can try:

- » Don't sit for a long time. Try to take more steps every day.
- » Every week aim for some faster activity, like fast walking, dancing or housework. Try and make it fun!
- » Do things that make you stronger - like carrying shopping bags, yoga or using weights.

Do as much as you can - **any activity is better than none**. Over time, you'll be able to do more.

[www.blf.org.uk/keep-active](http://www.blf.org.uk/keep-active)

Ask your doctor or nurse about **pulmonary rehabilitation (PR)**. These classes help you exercise and tell you more about COPD. Go to [www.blf.org.uk/PR](http://www.blf.org.uk/PR)

# Look after yourself

If you have COPD, you might feel unhappy at times. If you feel low or worried, ask your doctor or nurse about things to help you.

Don't keep things to yourself. Find someone in your family or a friend you can talk to about how you feel. Or talk to your doctor or nurse.

[www.blf.org.uk/low-mood](http://www.blf.org.uk/low-mood)

## tip

Join a support group. It's a great way to meet people who know what COPD is like. There are many support groups, exercise and singing groups.

Go to [www.blf.org.uk/support-in-your-area](http://www.blf.org.uk/support-in-your-area) or call our helpline to find one near you.

# We're here to help

Our friendly team can talk to you about your COPD and answer your questions.

Call our helpline on **03000 030 555**

Visit our website. We have lots more useful information to help you with your COPD at [www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you](http://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you)

Join our web community. [www.blf.org.uk/web-community](http://www.blf.org.uk/web-community)

## Questions for your doctor, nurse or pharmacist:

Don't forget to mention any of the ten things you couldn't tick on page 3.

Do I use my **inhaler** correctly?

Do I have the **best medicines** for my **COPD**?

Do I need a **rescue pack** for my **flare-ups**?

What can I do if I **feel ill**? Is my **flare-up plan** ok?

Can I get **pulmonary rehabilitation** (PR)?

your  
questions:



**We're the only UK charity looking after the nation's lungs.**

**We offer hope, help and a voice.**

**One day, everyone will breathe clean air with healthy lungs.**

**Only your support can make that happen.**

**Get in touch with us to find support near you.**

**Helpline: 03000 030 555**

**Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm**

**Ringling our helpline will cost the same as a local call.**

**helpline@blf.org.uk   blf.org.uk**

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We value feedback on our information. To give your views or ask about references, call our helpline or email [publications@blf.org.uk](mailto:publications@blf.org.uk). Visit [blf.org.uk](http://blf.org.uk) for the most up-to-date version of this information.

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