

Preventing Flare-Ups

A flare-up is a worsening of your COPD. Symptoms of a flare-up may be difficulty breathing, increased coughing or you're producing more mucus when you cough. A flare-up can be caused by an infection, an exposure to triggers or maybe for no known reason at all.

Preventing a flare-up

- Call your doctor if you have any of the following:
 - a change in the color, consistency, or amount of mucus
 - swelling in both your ankles
 - increased shortness of breath doing things you could do easily before
 - increased coughing
 - fever
 - some other symptoms: sudden weight gain, heart palpitations, unusual dizziness, sleepiness, headaches, visual disturbances, irritability or trouble thinking, loss of appetite, dehydration, chest pains, blood in mucus, urine, or bowel movement.
- The 24 hour rule:
 - Take a look at what your normal day is like. This is your baseline. If you wake up one morning and don't feel well, and know that this is not what your normal day is like, call the doctor if symptoms worsen throughout the day. Do not wait more than 24 hours to call your doctor. Mucus changes may not occur until later, and that may be too late. You need to prevent a flare up as soon as possible.
- Develop a "sick plan" with your doctor:
 - You should talk to your doctor about your symptom patterns and what actions you should take when they occur. They doctor may order a rescue inhaler to help with shortness of breath. The doctor may also have you start a pre-selected, prescribed antibiotic for signs of an infection. Do not try to treat yourself with over the counter medications. Speaking to your doctor about a plan will help you get through your flare-up.
- **If your symptoms are severe, call the doctor immediately.** You may need to call an ambulance or paramedics. Keep all phone numbers where you can see them. It may help you to think about what an emergency for you would be like ahead of time so that you can develop a plan. If you go on vacation, know where the local hospitals are and any local phone numbers that you may need in an emergency.

By knowing what the early warning signs are and developing a plan with your doctor, you can help prevent flare-ups.