

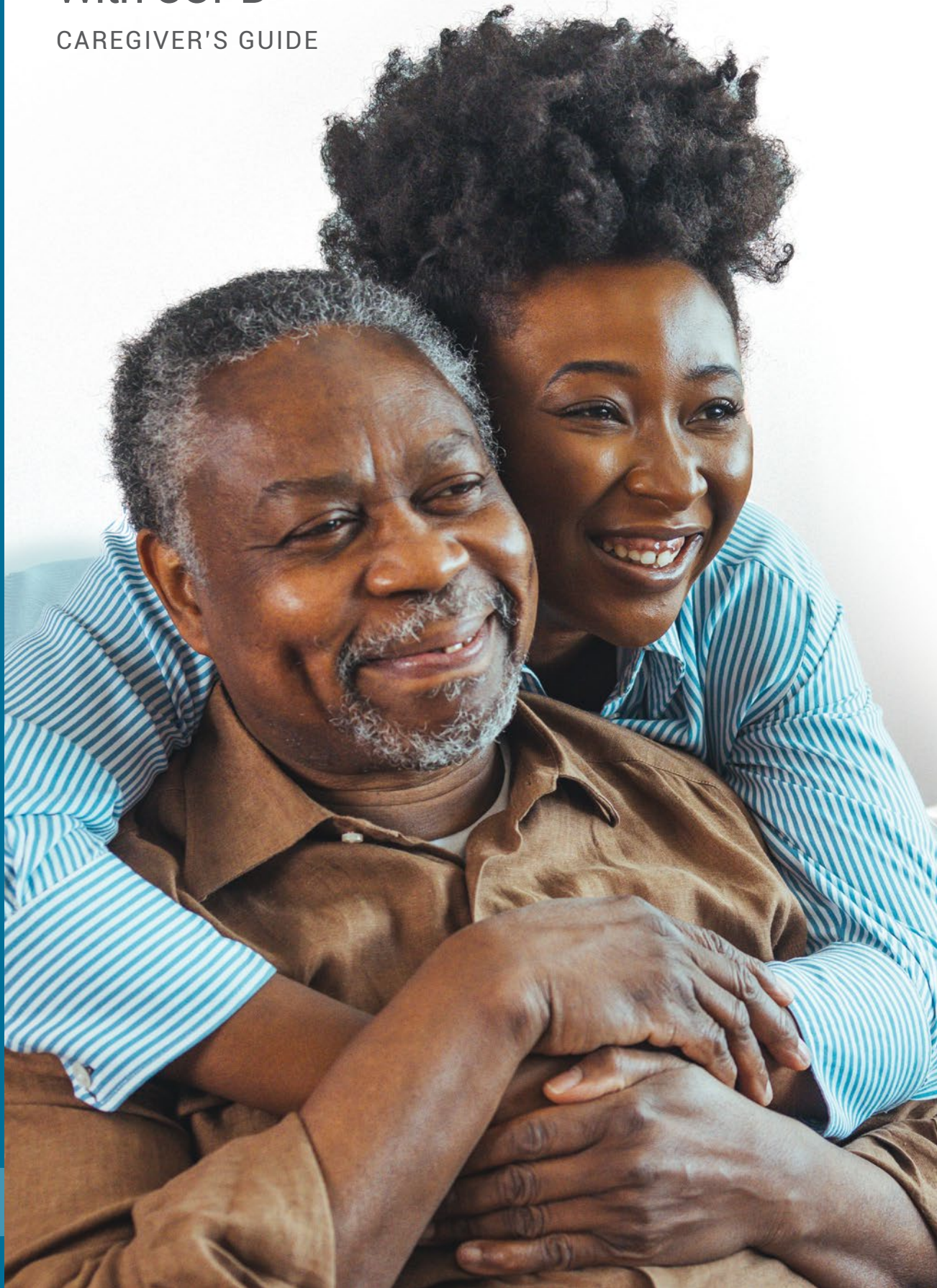
CHRONIC CARE

COPD

# Caring for a Loved One With COPD

CAREGIVER'S GUIDE

**Interim**  
HEALTHCARE®  
First in Home Care®



Home Health and  
Personal Care

## **COPD can be scary ... but you can be their support.**

If a loved one has been diagnosed with COPD, they know what it means to struggle to breathe. It's scary for them, and for you, but there are steps you can take together to make the road ahead easier.

As a caregiver, you can help them make the changes necessary to control their symptoms and breathe better. Just being there to support their health goals makes a big difference. COPD didn't happen overnight and it takes time to turn things around.

Our Caregiver's Guide is designed to educate family members about COPD and the integral role that medication, diet, exercise, energy conservation and stress management play in the care process. With a solid understanding of their disease and the care regimens required to manage it, you will be equipped to help them reach their COPD goals and move towards effective self-care.

At Interim HealthCare®, we understand how debilitating COPD can be, but you can be the support they need to face each challenge with confidence. As a caregiver, you are such a valuable part of the care process. As you support them, we'll be here to support you.



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***"More than 16.4 million Americans are living with COPD and there are many more with this condition who have yet to be diagnosed."***



## The Impact of COPD

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is the third leading cause of death in the United States. More than 16.4 million Americans are living with COPD and there are many more with this condition who have yet to be diagnosed.<sup>1</sup> The majority of people with COPD are over the age of 40 and it tends to be more prominent in women than in men. While there is not a cure for COPD, the good news is, it is often preventable and treatable. If your loved one has been diagnosed with COPD, there are steps they can take to gain control of their health and live a quality life, and you can help.

## Two Primary Types of COPD

COPD is a chronic disease that progresses over time, damaging a person's lungs and inhibiting their ability to breathe. The two most common types of COPD are Chronic bronchitis and emphysema. However, it's not uncommon for a person to have symptoms of both conditions so they are commonly referred to as COPD.

- **Chronic Bronchitis**—The bronchial tubes (lung's airways) become inflamed which produces swelling, an increase in mucus and a productive cough. This causes the airways to narrow, limiting the amount of air flowing in and out of the lungs resulting in shortness of breath. It is deemed chronic when symptoms persist for at least three months in two consecutive years.<sup>2</sup>
- **Emphysema**—There is an enlargement of airspaces in the lungs and the walls of the alveoli (air sacs) are destroyed. As a result, the alveoli lose their elasticity causing air that would normally be exhaled to get trapped in the lungs. This decreases the flow of oxygen from the lungs into the blood which causes shortness of breath.<sup>3</sup>

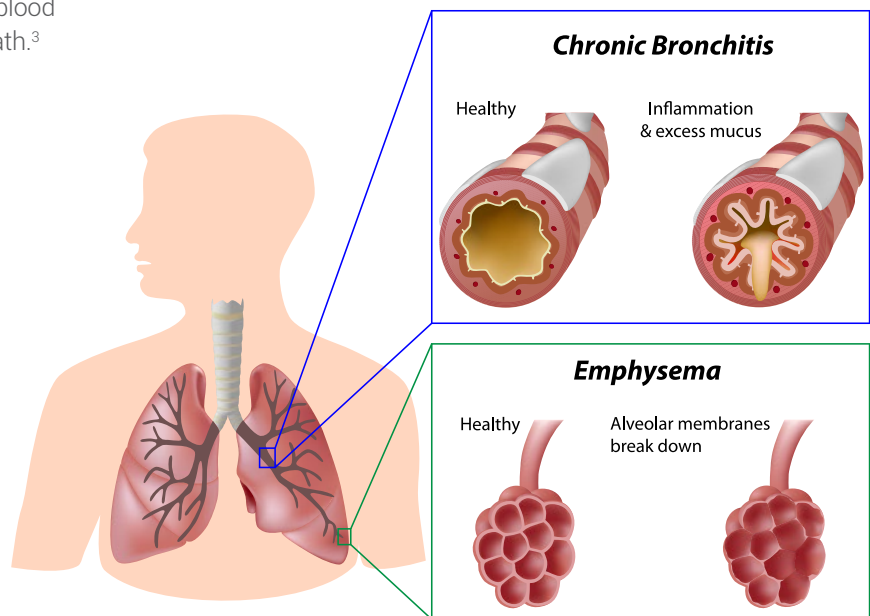
### Characteristics of Each Condition:<sup>4</sup>

#### Chronic Bronchitis

- Typically overweight
- Slight blue color to skin
- Productive cough
- Swelling in arms, legs, ankles
- Wheezing

#### Emphysema

- Typically thin and older
- Pinkish color to skin
- Shallow, rapid breathing
- Quiet, barrel chest
- Pursed lips



## Causes of COPD

The main cause of COPD is exposure to harmful toxins and irritants in the environment that damage the lungs and its air passages. Among them, cigarette smoking is the leading cause, accounting for 85 to 90 percent of all COPD cases.<sup>5</sup> Every time a cigarette burns, it releases more than 7,000 chemicals which can cause direct harm to your lungs.<sup>6</sup> These toxins not only damage your lungs, they make you more prone to respiratory infections. Over time, smoking causes the lung's airways to narrow, air tubes to swell and air sacs to be destroyed, which lead to COPD. While smoking is the primary cause, it's not the only one. COPD may be the result of several different factors, including:

1 [www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/learn-about-copd](http://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/learn-about-copd)  
2 [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/copd/symptoms-causes/syc-20353679](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/copd/symptoms-causes/syc-20353679)  
3 [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/copd/symptoms-causes/syc-20353679](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/copd/symptoms-causes/syc-20353679)  
4 [www.copd.net/clinical/blue-bloaters-pink-puffers](http://www.copd.net/clinical/blue-bloaters-pink-puffers)  
5 [www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/what-causes-copd](http://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/what-causes-copd)  
6 [www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/what-causes-copd](http://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/what-causes-copd)

- Smoking cigarettes
- Breathing in secondhand smoke
- Exposure to chemicals, fumes, vapors, dust and mold
- Living in an environment with air pollution
- Alpha-1 deficiency, a genetic condition leaving the lungs unprotected

## Increased Health Risks

If your loved one has been diagnosed with COPD, it's important to be aware of the health risks associated with it. In addition, they may have a higher susceptibility to COPD complications if they are living with health issues such as Asthma or a history of respiratory infections. One thing is certain, their lungs have been damaged and their defense system has been weakened. As a caregiver, it's good to know what these risks are so you can address potential issues early on. Some of these risks include:

- Heart attack, heart failure and chest pain
- Lung cancer
- Pulmonary hypertension
- Osteoporosis
- Sleep apnea
- Depression and anxiety
- Poor nutrition
- Respiratory infections (colds, flu, pneumonia)



## Lifestyle Changes It Requires

While COPD is not curable, it is treatable. So, if a loved one has been diagnosed with COPD, it's time to make some changes. And, if they smoke, the most significant change they can make is to quit smoking. Their lungs are damaged and it is becoming increasingly difficult to breathe. Continuing to smoke will cause their symptoms to worsen rapidly which can trigger a flare-up, known as a COPD exacerbation, and pose greater health risks.

In addition, they will need to make medication, diet, exercise, energy conservation and air quality a priority in their daily life. This includes following their prescribed medication regimen to open their airways so they can breathe easier; changing their diet to help manage their weight and ensure they have the nutrients required to fight their disease; exercising to build endurance, improve their respiratory health and reduce anxiety and stress; and conserving energy for daily tasks to prevent episodes of labored breathing. Finally, they must be vigilant to improve the quality of air they breathe and eliminate COPD triggers such as secondhand smoke, harmful fumes and air pollution that could lead to a flare-up.

As a caregiver, you can be a source of encouragement and support as they make these lifestyle changes. While change is never easy at first, it will soon become a part of their routine enabling them to breathe easier and live a higher quality of life—and that's well worth it.

## Partnering With Their Physician

Your loved one's physician will provide them with a plan of care to help them learn to manage their condition. This is a roadmap to better health, and as their caregiver, you can help them navigate it successfully. Keeping doctor appointments and coming prepared with the information they need to review is key. This includes a list of medication and dosages, prescribed oxygen therapy, their response to medication, changes in their condition and any questions they might have.

If your loved one smokes and quitting is a challenge for them, their physician can assist with options to help curb their addiction to nicotine. And, if they are experiencing anxiety or depression, they can discuss it openly and get the support

they need to start feeling better. Most importantly, if they are showing early signs of a COPD exacerbation, notify their doctor immediately so their symptoms can be addressed before it becomes an emergency.

## The Important Role Caregivers Play

As a caregiver, you can have a huge influence in your loved one's ability to manage their condition and live a quality life. COPD can be scary and the road ahead is not an easy one, but having someone who loves them walk alongside them in their journey makes all the difference. You can help them stay on track with their plan of care and find the courage they need to do the hard things. Sometimes, a simple shift in perspective can change everything.

You can help your loved one in many different ways:

<b>Supporting them in their effort to quit smoking</b>
<b>Improving the quality of air they breathe at home</b>
<b>Eliminating COPD triggers from their environment</b>
<b>Reminding them to take their medication at scheduled times</b>
<b>Ensuring they are using their inhaler properly</b>
<b>Assisting with prescribed oxygen when needed</b>
<b>Preparing meals that comply with their prescribed diet</b>
<b>Participating in approved exercises with them</b>
<b>Organizing their home for easier access to items needed</b>
<b>Encouraging rest to conserve energy for daily tasks</b>
<b>Reporting early signs of a flare-up to their doctor</b>
<b>Leading them in breathing exercises when they are anxious</b>
<b>Assisting with daily tasks that deplete their energy</b>
<b>Ensuring prescriptions are refilled when needed</b>
<b>Documenting their condition for their physician</b>
<b>Keeping scheduled doctor appointments</b>
<b>Encouraging them in all aspects of COPD self-care</b>

## How We Can Help You

At Interim HealthCare, we understand the fears and challenges that COPD brings and we're here to help. First in home care, we've been a trusted source of care to individuals living with COPD since 1966. Our COPD Caregiver's Guide will equip you with the education, insights and guidance you need to understand their disease and what it takes to manage it.

If your family member needs support at home to help manage their disease and the activities of daily living, our home healthcare professionals and home care aides can help. Trained in COPD, our home health team will guide your loved one through the regimens of effective self-care. And, if shortness of breath is making daily routines difficult, our home care aides can assist with bathing, dressing, grooming, meals and light housekeeping to make living with COPD a little easier. Whatever your loved one needs, Interim HealthCare will support them in their journey to better health.

# HomeLife

## ENRICHMENT®



### A Holistic Approach to COPD Care

At Interim HealthCare, we believe in care for the whole individual, not just one part—and it is embedded in every aspect of our care model. Our HomeLife Enrichment® (HLE) standard of care thoughtfully engages the mind, body, spirit and family to ensure an optimal care experience.

Our HLE model gives caregivers a holistic view of COPD care and how interconnected each aspect of care is to achieving successful outcomes. In this guide, we will explore each part of the care process to give you a clear understanding of what your loved one needs and how best to care for them.

### Self-Care is the Ultimate Goal

COPD is a chronic disease that requires long-term care. For this reason, our focus of care is designed to equip your loved one to care for their condition going forward. At Interim HealthCare, effective self-care is our ultimate goal. As they follow the plan of care set forth by their physician, they will start to see their COPD symptoms improve and their disease become more manageable. This caregiver's guide contains all the information you need to understand their condition and what is required to manage it.

In the following sections of this guide, we will look at specific ways to care for your loved one's mind, body, spirit and family in order to reach this goal.







## MIND

*Care for the mind involves insight and understanding about COPD which leads to actions that produce new habits and positively impact outcomes.*

### Understanding COPD

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is an inflammatory disease that limits the flow of air in the lungs, making it more difficult for a person to breathe. Currently, more than 16.4 million people have been diagnosed with COPD, but an estimated 60 to 85 percent of mild or moderate cases have gone undiagnosed.<sup>7</sup> Also known as chronic bronchitis and emphysema, the shortness of breath and lack of energy that it brings is often dismissed as just getting older. COPD is caused by long-term exposure to harmful gases and particles, often from smoking cigarettes. The best way to slow the progression of it is to stop smoking and remove any triggers in your environment that are causing it. While COPD is not curable, it is preventable and treatable with medication, oxygen therapy, pulmonary rehabilitation and a good support system. This means, your loved one can learn to control their symptoms and live a quality life.

### COPD Symptoms

The symptoms of COPD often go undetected or dismissed until significant lung damage has already occurred. A cough that won't go away or feeling tired and out of breath doing everyday activities are just a few of the warning signs that should not be ignored. As a caregiver, being aware of the symptoms will allow you to respond promptly with the care and support your loved one needs to manage their disease.



#### Shortness of breath

Feeling out of breath doing everyday activities or even while resting. This is caused by the inflammation in their lungs which limits the amount of air coming in and out of the lungs, resulting in shortness of breath.



#### Persistent cough

A chronic cough that never seems to go away. The inflamed airways of their lungs swell and produce mucus, also known as sputum, which causes your loved one to cough.



#### Coughing up mucus

The irritation in their lungs causes an increase in mucus production. Coughing up the mucus is a natural response which helps clear their airways so they can breathe easier.



#### Wheezing

A whistling sound that occurs when you exhale air through obstructed air passages, which is likely due to the buildup of mucus in the lungs.



#### Fatigue

Feeling exhausted due to an insufficient supply of oxygen going to the blood and muscles. The inflamed lungs now have to work harder to get oxygen in and carbon dioxide out of the body.

<sup>7</sup> [www.oxygenconcentratorstore.com/blog/5-surprising-facts-about-copd/](http://www.oxygenconcentratorstore.com/blog/5-surprising-facts-about-copd/)



MIND



### **Chest tightness**

When air that would normally be exhaled gets trapped in the lungs due to damaged air sacs, it can cause a feeling of tightness in the chest.



### **Frequent respiratory infections**

The weakened immune system and inability to clear the lungs of pollutants makes a person more susceptible to respiratory infections such as colds, flu and pneumonia.



### **Swelling in ankles, feet and legs**

Fluid retention, known as edema, in the lower extremities. With COPD, the heart has to work harder to pump blood to the damaged lungs, resulting in a buildup of fluid in the body.

## **The Importance of Early Detection**

COPD is often not diagnosed until the disease is in the advanced stages and significant lung damage has occurred. According to a respiratory study,<sup>8</sup> many cases go undiagnosed due to less severe airflow obstruction and fewer symptoms. It's not until labored breathing, known as dyspnea, becomes more progressive that patients seek medical attention. And for some, it's not until a person is hospitalized with a COPD exacerbation that a diagnosis is made. This is a big concern since COPD outcomes can be much less severe when caught early.

If a family member is experiencing a chronic cough, increased mucus and fatigue, they should see a doctor right away to determine if it is the beginning stages of COPD. An early treatment plan can minimize the damage to their lungs so they can continue to live a quality life.

## **Diagnosing COPD**

If your loved one is exhibiting respiratory symptoms indicative of COPD, a physician can take several measures to diagnose it:

- **Evaluate signs and symptoms of COPD, such as:**
  - Persistent cough
  - Increase in mucus production
  - Shortness of breath
  - Unusually tired
- **Discuss factors that contribute to COPD:**
  - History of cigarette smoking
  - Exposure to secondhand smoke, air pollution, dust or other harmful chemicals
  - Family medical history of COPD or other lung-related diseases
- **Assess their lung function level using various diagnostic tests and scans:**
  - **Spirometry test:** Pulmonary test that involves blowing air into a tube which measures the amount of air your lungs can hold and how quickly you can blow air out of your lungs
  - **Arterial blood gas test:** Blood test that measures the level of oxygen in the blood, revealing the lung's ability to move oxygen into the blood and remove carbon dioxide

8 [www.respiratory-research.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12931-018-0731-1](http://www.respiratory-research.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12931-018-0731-1)



- **Chest X-ray:** Provides a detailed picture of the lungs, which can reveal enlarged lungs, flattened diaphragm or air pockets in the lungs indicative of COPD
- **CT Scan:** A CT scan of the chest may show damage to the walls of the bronchial air sacs or airway inflammation indicative of emphysema and chronic bronchitis
- **Lab tests:** Blood test to determine if you have a genetic disorder associated with COPD resulting from an alpha-1-antitrypsin deficiency

### Following Prescribed Medication

A crucial part of helping your loved one manage their COPD is following their prescribed medication regimen. After a diagnosis is made, their physician will work with them to develop a treatment plan that is best for their symptoms and lifestyle. This medication is intended to help open their airways and reduce inflammation so they can breathe easier. It is also used to treat flare-ups known as COPD exacerbations.

As a family caregiver, it's important to know what medication they are taking, how it works, potential side effects and when refills are needed so your loved one does not miss a dose. Medication comes in four different forms:

- Tablets (oral)
- Inhalers
- Nebulized solutions
- Oxygen

COPD medication varies based on the severity of their condition and the needs of each individual. Some types of medication are long-acting (maintenance), which take more time to see effects and work for longer periods of time; others are short-acting (rescue), which begin working right away but for shorter periods of time. The most common types of COPD medication include:

- **Bronchodilators**—Medication used in inhalers to relax the tightened muscles around the airways so breathing is easier and mucus can easily be coughed out.
- **Corticosteroids**—Anti-inflammatory medication that can be inhaled or taken orally to reduce swelling and mucus production in the airways. Short courses of oral corticosteroids may be used to help control flare-ups.
- **Oxygen therapy**—Prescribed for those who do not have enough oxygen in their blood to function properly. This supplemental oxygen can help individuals with COPD live and breathe easier, during activities, while sleeping or for regular daily use.

Depending on their treatment plan, your loved one may be on more than one type of medication to control their symptoms. The end goal is to make breathing easier so they can continue to live a quality life.





## Do's and Don'ts of Managing COPD

There are many ways you can help your loved one manage their COPD and live a healthier life. Understanding what will improve their symptoms and what will make them worse is crucial for caregivers of COPD patients to know.

DO'S	DON'TS
Quit smoking: This is the best thing you can do to slow the progression of COPD, breathe easier and prolong your life.	Don't continue to smoke: It makes breathing more difficult and leads to COPD exacerbations that can be life-threatening.
Avoid triggers: Stay away from lung irritants such as secondhand smoke, chemical fumes, dust, mold and air pollution.	Don't expose yourself to harmful fumes: Lung irritants can cause shortness of breath and lead to a flare-up.
Follow your treatment plan: Medication, oxygen therapy, diet and exercise all work together to help manage your COPD.	Don't deviate from your treatment plan: Talk to your doctor about making adjustments to your treatment plan if it's not working for you.
Conserve your energy: Plan times of rest, organize your home for easy access, keep a chair in the shower and ask for help with tasks that deplete your energy.	Don't use all your energy on one task: It can leave you breathless and make it hard to get through the day.
Always keep your inhaler with you: If something triggers your COPD, you'll have what you need to manage the situation.	Don't presume you won't need your inhaler: An unexpected flare-up can lead to greater distress if you don't have it.
Improve indoor air: Swap toxic cleaning products and sprays for natural ones and use a humidifier to keep air moist.	Don't allow lung irritants in your home: Remove toxic products, sprays and fumes so you can breathe easier.
Practice calming techniques: When breathless due to triggers or emotional upset, pursed lip breathing and relaxation exercises can calm you down.	Don't panic when shortness of breath occurs: Anxiety will only make breathing issues worse; practice calming measures.
Only take prescribed medication: If you need supplemental meds to control coughing, discuss it with your doctor first.	Don't take over-the-counter cough medicine: Cough suppressants cause mucus to accumulate in your chest which can lead to an infection.
Exercise daily: Talk to your doctor about safe exercises that will build stamina and strength to make breathing easier.	Don't assume exercise is out: Safe exercises can strengthen respiratory muscles and enable you to breathe easier.
Follow your prescribed diet: Eating the right foods and maintaining a healthy weight will help you breathe better.	Don't eat foods that make symptoms worse: Food that is high in sodium causes fluid retention, making it harder to breathe.
Seek emotional support: Find friends and family who will support you when you're feeling anxious or depressed.	Don't isolate yourself: Family and friends can lift you up when you're down and help you stay calm when anxiety hits.

## COPD Triggers

The most important thing you can do to help your loved one manage their COPD is to understand what triggers their symptoms. While it may be different for each person, they generally fall into one of the following categories:

- Cigarette smoke
- Air pollution
- Mold
- Dust and gas cooking fumes
- Chemicals in industrial environments
- Cleaning products
- Hairspray, perfume and lotion
- Scented candles and deodorizers
- Bug spray and insecticides
- Really hot, cold or humid temperatures
- Respiratory infections
- Emotional upset

## Preventative Measures

The best way to help your loved one prevent a COPD flare-up is to be intentional about eliminating triggers from their environment. Some are easier to remove than others, but there are preventative measures you can take to minimize their symptoms:

- Stay away from places where people are smoking
- Wear a mask in locations with air pollution, dust and fumes
- Keep your home well-ventilated and clear of dust
- Address any issues of mold in your home immediately
- Do not cook with a gas stove in an unventilated space
- If workplace chemicals and fumes are a problem, consider a change
- Use unscented, non-toxic cleaning products
- Do not use hairspray, lotions or perfumes in your home
- Remove any scented candles or deodorizers from your home
- Do not use bug sprays or insecticides in your home
- Avoid excessive temperatures outside and inside
- Practice good handwashing to prevent illnesses

## COPD Exacerbations

If your loved one's respiratory symptoms suddenly become worse, despite the use of maintenance medication, they are most likely having a COPD exacerbation. This is a serious health situation that requires immediate attention from a doctor. If their physician is unavailable, you will need to take them to the nearest emergency room. Here are a few important things you should know about flare-ups:

### Causes:

Exacerbations are typically caused by exposure to lung irritants (COPD triggers) or a viral or bacterial lung infection.

### Length of Flare-Up:

COPD flare-ups can last a few days or up to a few weeks.



### Urgency of Care:

Exacerbations cause permanent damage to the lungs. That's why it is important for caregivers to take proactive measures to prevent them. Recognizing the signs of an oncoming flare-up is crucial to getting your loved one the timely care they need.

### Signs of a COPD Exacerbation:<sup>9</sup>

- Hard to catch their breath
- Coughing fits and wheezing
- Increased mucus production
- Fatigue and difficulty sleeping
- Swelling in legs/ankles
- Lower level of oxygen
- Severe shortness of breath\*
- Chest pain\*
- Bluish tone to lips/fingers\*
- Confusion or disorientation\*



\* Call 911 immediately if your loved one exhibits any of these critical signs.

### What To Do:

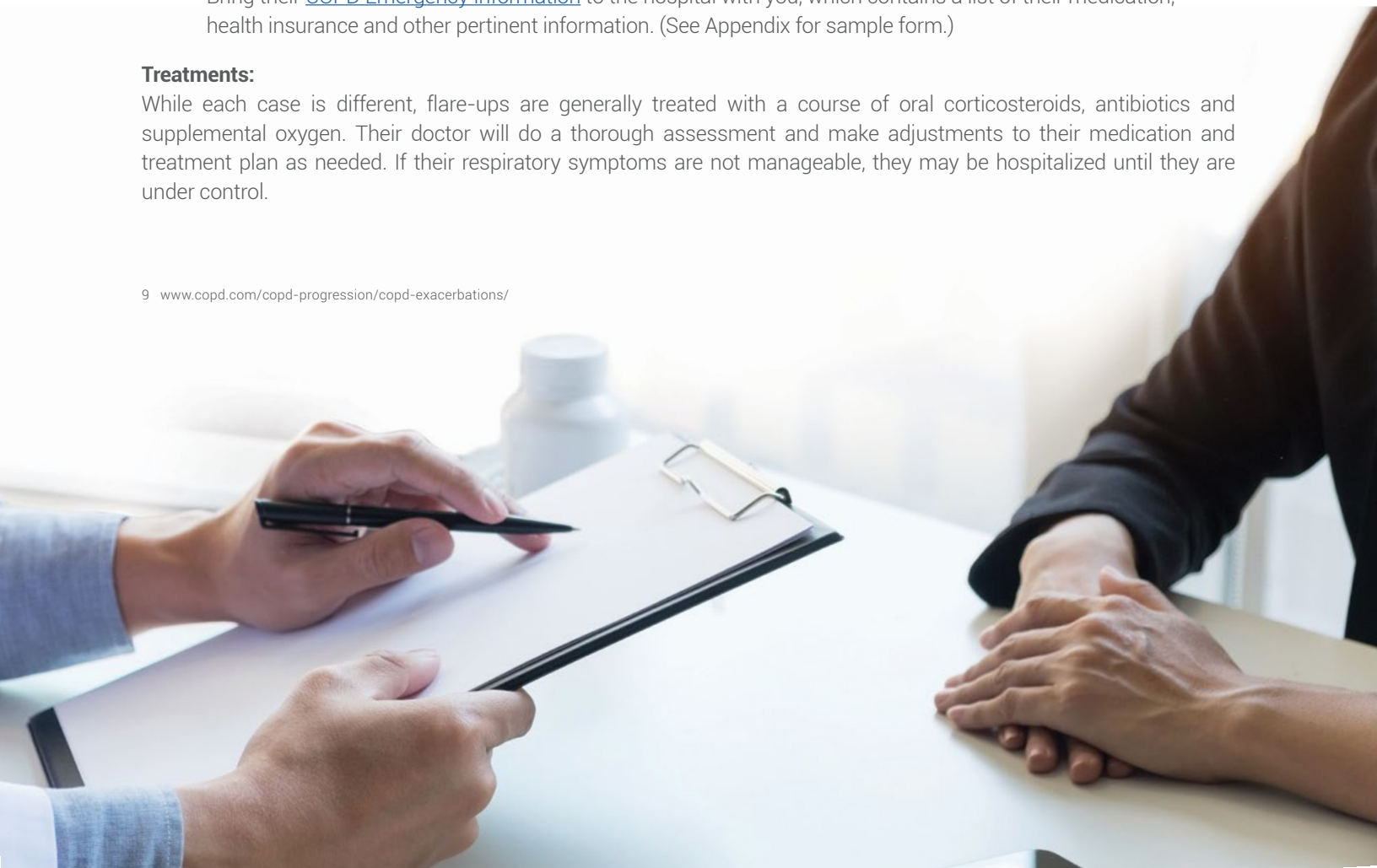
As their caregiver, you can help your loved one in several ways. First, contact their physician and seek immediate medical care. Their doctor should have a COPD emergency plan in place which should take precedence over any general guidelines provided here.

- Use a rescue inhaler to help relax their lungs so they can breathe easier.
- If they have prescribed oxygen at home, assist them with it for immediate relief.
- Lead them in pursed lip breathing or belly breathing to help calm their anxiety.
- Bring their [COPD Emergency Information](#) to the hospital with you, which contains a list of their medication, health insurance and other pertinent information. (See Appendix for sample form.)

### Treatments:

While each case is different, flare-ups are generally treated with a course of oral corticosteroids, antibiotics and supplemental oxygen. Their doctor will do a thorough assessment and make adjustments to their medication and treatment plan as needed. If their respiratory symptoms are not manageable, they may be hospitalized until they are under control.

9 [www.copd.com/copd-progression/copd-exacerbations/](http://www.copd.com/copd-progression/copd-exacerbations/)



## Goals for COPD

Setting some goals will help your loved one focus on aspects of COPD care that enable them to breathe better and live a higher quality of life. Here are some examples of goals that will improve their health:

1. Quit smoking
2. Eliminate triggers
3. Improve indoor air
4. Exercise daily
5. Eat healthier
6. Join a COPD support group
7. Learn to self-care
8. Guard against infections

It is helpful to map out how achieving each goal will benefit them and what actions they need to take to reach it. For example, if their goal is to quit smoking here's what it might include:

<b>Goal #1</b>	<b>Quit smoking</b>
<b>Benefits</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I will be able to breathe easier.</li> <li>2. It will reduce my risk of a COPD flare-up.</li> <li>3. It may prevent other health complications with my heart and lungs.</li> <li>4. It has the potential to extend my life.</li> </ol>
<b>Actions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I will discuss options to help me quit with my physician (nicotine gum, nicotine patch or meds).</li> <li>2. I will remove all cigarettes, lighters and ash trays from my home.</li> <li>3. I will purposely stay away from places and situations where I am tempted to smoke.</li> <li>4. I will seek a support group to help me quit smoking.</li> </ol>

In the Appendix, we have included a COPD Goals Worksheet to assist them in this process. Writing it down is the first step to taking action!

## Managing Multiple Chronic Conditions

It's not uncommon for individuals with COPD to be living with more than one chronic disease, known as comorbidities. In addition, having COPD increases their risk for developing other chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease, lung cancer, diabetes and osteoporosis.

If your loved one is managing multiple chronic diseases, medication management is critical to ensuring the meds they are taking for different conditions are all safe to take together without adverse effects. As their caregiver, it's important to keep a current record of all the medication your loved one is taking and bring it with you to each doctor appointment so they can review it. Their primary care physician should be aware of all health conditions your loved one is being treated for and the medication they are taking to manage them. Before any new meds are prescribed, this information should be reviewed and reconciled to ensure your loved one's health safety.

## Equipping Individuals for Self-Care

The most valuable thing caregivers can do for their loved one is to equip them with the knowledge and insights they need to successfully self-care for their COPD. The ability to breathe better is great motivation to learn the elements of care required to live a quality life.

Self-care means understanding what helps their COPD and what hurts it and making the necessary changes to improve their health. It involves:

<b>Determining to quit smoking</b>
<b>Knowing triggers and limiting their exposure to them</b>
<b>Understanding how medication works and when to take it</b>
<b>Adjusting their diet to incorporate healthy foods that improve breathing</b>
<b>Making exercise a regular part of their routine</b>
<b>Conserving energy for daily tasks and getting their rest</b>
<b>Recognizing the signs of an exacerbation and knowing what to do</b>
<b>Knowing how to use inhalers, nebulizers and oxygen properly</b>
<b>Learning healthy ways to cough up mucus</b>
<b>Washing their hands regularly to prevent respiratory infections</b>
<b>Practicing breathing techniques that help when shortness of breath occurs</b>
<b>Following their plan of care and keeping doctor appointments</b>

In the next section of this guide, we will explore ways you can help your loved one manage their COPD by taking good care of their body.







## BODY

*Care for the body involves a combination of diet, medication, exercise and rest. This is a crucial part of managing COPD and minimizing other serious health risks associated with it.*

### Following the Treatment Plan

Your loved one's COPD treatment plan will combine several components of care that all work together to help them manage their symptoms. Much like the body, each part has a function in their ability to live a quality life—and breathe easier. Their prescribed treatment plan may include:

- A plan to quit smoking
- Inhaled, nebulized & oral medication
- Oxygen therapy
- Pulmonary rehabilitation
- Exacerbation management
- Diet & exercise
- Energy conservation

As their caregiver, you can be a source of encouragement and accountability to follow the plan of care prescribed by their physician. It may take some getting used to, but once they start to see some positive results, it will become part of their daily routine.

### Managing Shortness of Breath

Feeling short of breath is a hallmark symptom of COPD. Your loved one's damaged lungs have impeded the flow of air in and out of their lungs, making it difficult to breathe. For those with chronic bronchitis, it's due to inflammation and mucus buildup, causing their airways to narrow and prevent the flow of air. And, for those with emphysema, it's due to the loss of elasticity in the air sacs, causing air to get trapped in their lungs and reducing the flow of oxygen into their blood. Depending on your loved one's diagnosis, their physician will prescribe medication that helps open their lungs so they can breathe easier.

While their lungs are prone to shortness of breath, exposure to smoke, air pollution and other COPD triggers will surely cause it. And, if not addressed promptly, it can lead to a flare-up. As their caregiver, it is critical that you know what to do when shortness of breath occurs. This may include:

- Using a short-acting rescue inhaler to open their airways
- Giving them supplemental oxygen (if prescribed) for relief
- Doing controlled breathing exercises to ease anxiety and open their lungs
- Positioning them upright in a chair or bed to ease the flow of oxygen
- If shortness of breath is unmanageable, call their doctor and seek emergency care

### It's Time To Quit Smoking

The majority of COPD cases are the result of long-term cigarette smoking. If your loved one smokes, it is no longer an option if they want to live a quality life. The chemicals released in a lit cigarette will unleash havoc on their lungs if they do. It comes down to this: If they want to breathe comfortably, they have to quit smoking. Continuing to smoke will cause their COPD to progress rapidly, causing exacerbations that do permanent, irreversible lung damage which can lead to respiratory failure. As their caregiver, you can help them in many different ways:

- Discuss the consequences of not quitting; ultimately, it's their decision
- Offer options that help such as nicotine gum, a nicotine patch or medication



BODY

- Be intentional about quitting: set a date, time and action plan
- Shift their focus to something else when they have the urge to smoke
- Stay away from situations, places and people that make them want to smoke
- Join a local support group through the American Lung Association
- Get rid of all cigarettes, lighters, matches and ashtrays
- Find something positive to replace it, like exercising, learning, reading or walking
- Stay hydrated, but avoid caffeine and alcohol which can trigger a desire to smoke
- Focus on the goal: Breathing easier and slowing the progression of COPD

### Resources to Help Them Quit

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers a variety of free resources, tools and information on [tobacco cessation](#), including:

- [Guide](#) to help your loved one quit
- Resources and support to help:
  - Free [confidential coaching](#): 1-800-QUIT-NOW
  - Online resources: [CDC.gov/quit](#) and [Smokefree.gov](#)
  - Texting programs: [SmokefreeTXT](#)
  - Mobile app: [quitSTART](#)
- Information about [medication and therapy](#)
- Ways to manage [withdrawal symptoms](#)
- [Insurance coverage](#) for smoking cessation medication
- How to build a [Quit Plan](#)



### Pulmonary Rehabilitation

COPD can limit your loved one's ability to participate in everyday activities that make life more fulfilling. Pulmonary rehabilitation can provide the education and support they need to learn to breathe better, regain their strength and manage their symptoms so they can enjoy life.

### What to Expect

Most pulmonary rehabilitation programs take place at an outpatient rehab clinic or medical facility, but some aspects of the program may be provided at home. It is typically offered in a small group format which allows your loved one to engage with others dealing with similar health challenges. The peer support is a great benefit to those struggling with COPD, as they can encourage each other along in their health journey and know they are not alone.

A team of specialists, which may include a doctor, nurse, dietitian, exercise physiologist, respiratory therapist and physical therapist, will create a personalized plan that meets your loved one's needs. Pulmonary rehabilitation programs typically provide:

- Education on COPD and symptom management
- Supervised exercise training
- Breathing techniques and effective use of oxygen
- Guidance on diet and nutrition
- Emotional support and counseling



The ultimate goal of the program is to help your loved one breathe better and re-engage in the activities they love. During the program, they will learn how to exercise safely; monitor oxygen levels and make adjustments to prevent shortness of breath; understand the importance of a healthy diet and weight management; and find the peer support and counseling they need to combat depression and anxiety associated with their disease.

If your loved one would benefit from a pulmonary rehabilitation program, talk to their doctor about programs in your area, or visit [www.livebetter.org/directory](http://www.livebetter.org/directory).

## Medication and Therapy

As a caregiver, you can help your loved one with the medication and therapy they need to see tangible results in their health. The best thing you can do is to help them comply with their prescribed medication and therapy regimen. Here are some practical ways you can help:

- Create a schedule for medication/therapy and post it in a visible place
- Set reminders for daily medication
- Keep a log of daily meds, results and any side effects
- Bring their medication log to appointments for their doctor to review
- Manage any changes to meds or dosages
- Refill prescriptions before they run out
- Keep doctors apprised of all medications to ensure no bad drug interactions
- Learn how meds are administered to ensure proper use
- If medication is not helping, inform their doctor so adjustments can be made
- If oxygen is low, discuss supplemental oxygen with their doctor
- Assist your loved one with any prescribed therapies

## Inhaled Medication

Many of the meds prescribed for COPD come in an inhaled form. That means, your loved one will need to use an inhaler or a nebulizer to take them. As a caregiver, it's important to know how an inhaler and a nebulizer work so you can ensure your family member is using it properly and getting the right benefit from it. If you are unsure, ask their physician or nurse to demonstrate the correct way to use it.

### Two Types of Inhalers:

- 1. Maintenance inhalers**—Intended for daily use with long-acting medication. Maintenance meds should be taken every day, even when your loved one is feeling good. Maintenance inhalers can be used with one, two or three types of medication:<sup>10</sup>
  - **Monotherapy:** One long-acting bronchodilator is used to dilate the lung's airways.
  - **Dual therapy:** Two types of medication are used to open their airways and decrease inflammation. It combines either an anti-inflammatory with a long-acting bronchodilator or it combines two long-acting bronchodilators that work together to provide relief.
  - **Triple therapy:** Three types of medication are combined to help open the airways in the lungs, which includes one anti-inflammatory and two long-acting bronchodilators.
- 2. Rescue inhalers**—Used as needed with short-acting medication. Rescue meds begin working immediately to provide fast relief over a shorter period of time. Your loved one should keep their rescue inhaler with them at all times.

<sup>10</sup> [www.copd.com/copd-treatment/daily-copd-maintenance-therapy](http://www.copd.com/copd-treatment/daily-copd-maintenance-therapy)



## Oxygen Therapy

If your loved one's blood oxygen levels are low, their doctor may prescribe supplemental oxygen, known as oxygen therapy. This can make it easier for them to participate in activities and live a higher quality of life. Maybe they only need it for specific activities or while sleeping. Whatever the case may be, it is another source of support that can assist your loved one when breathing is hard. There are many benefits to oxygen therapy, including:

- Increased energy
- Better sleep
- Ability to be more active
- Improved focus
- Less anxiety about breathing

Oxygen can be administered at home through a large tank or through smaller wheeled tanks that enable your loved one to be more mobile. It's important for caregivers to follow safety protocols when using oxygen to avoid potential fire hazards. When oxygen is in use, there should be no smoking in the home. If they need a change in the amount of oxygen prescribed, consult their doctor before making any adjustments to ensure their safety.

The scariest part about COPD is the inability to breathe easily. Oxygen therapy can provide the support your loved one needs to remain active and enjoy life—and it's the only treatment with the potential to prolong life.

## Prescribed Therapies

In addition to oxygen therapy, there are several other prescribed therapies which may help your loved one manage their COPD more effectively. Depending on their condition and what their physician believes would be the best treatment plan, they may be prescribed:

- **Respiratory therapy**—Teaching them exercises that can improve their breathing and how to use oxygen equipment properly.
- **Physical therapy**—Assisting them with exercise training and breathing techniques that can increase their ability to stay active and effectively manage shortness of breath.
- **Occupational therapy**—Coaching them on ways to conserve energy and simplify tasks that make activities easier, as well as exercises that can increase their upper strength.
- **Medical social services**—Helping patients and their families understand COPD and connecting them to resources and counseling that can help with emotional, financial and social needs.

## Energy Conservation

With COPD, your loved one can get tired doing simple tasks which causes shortness of breath. So, it's important that they structure their days in ways that conserve energy for the things they really want to do. Here are some simple things they can do to make the routines of everyday life easier:<sup>11</sup>

- Plan ahead for daily activities
- Prioritize what's most important to get done
- Pace themselves throughout their day

<sup>11</sup> [www.my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/9449-copd-conserving-your-energy](http://www.my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/9449-copd-conserving-your-energy)



- Ask for help with strenuous tasks from family and friends
- Get plenty of sleep at night and keep their head elevated
- Sit while grooming themselves—shaving, drying hair, etc.
- Wear clothes that are easy to put on and take off
- Digest and rest after a meal; do not rush into an activity
- Organize their home so items regularly used are easy to access
- Use assistive devices such as a shower chair, walker and dressing stick
- Sit or stand in an upright position to get more oxygen into their lungs



### Medical Equipment

Caring for a family member with COPD may require several different kinds of medical equipment to manage their symptoms. Becoming familiar with these devices will enable you to assist them when they are having trouble breathing or just need extra support. Equipment may include:<sup>12</sup>

- **Inhaler**—Small handheld device that sprays medicine which is inhaled into their lungs through their nose or mouth.
- **Nebulizer**—Small device that turns liquid medicine into a mist which is breathed in through a mouthpiece or mask.
- **Pulse oximeter**—Small device that typically clips onto their fingertip and measures the oxygen saturation in their blood as well as their pulse rate.
- **Supplemental oxygen**—Tanks come in different sizes for home and mobile use which are filled with compressed oxygen and attach to a thin hose with a nasal cannula or mask. There are also oxygen concentrators which pull in room air which then purifies, compresses and stores it in a tank that provides fresh oxygen through a cannula.
- **Bi-level positive air pressure (BiPAP)**—Machine with a hose attached to a mask or nosepiece that provides steady air pressure to open the lung's airways for better breathing.
- **Mobile apps**—There are a variety of mobile apps that can help individuals with COPD manage their symptoms, lead them in breathing exercises and even check the quality of air in a specific location. Here are a few helpful apps you can explore: [MyCOPD](#), [AirNOW](#) and [Breathe2Relax](#).

### Diet and Nutrition

Helping your loved one manage their COPD symptoms requires more than just medication; it may require a new approach to eating to ensure they are getting the right nutrition to stay strong, reduce inflammation and breathe easier.

With COPD, being overweight or underweight can impact your loved one's ability to fight their disease. Being overweight can significantly alter the mechanical properties of their lungs and chest wall which impacts the functionality of their entire respiratory system, causing wheezing and shortness of breath.<sup>13</sup> Being underweight means they are not getting the proper nourishment to keep their respiratory muscles strong which can make them feel weak, fatigued and unable to exercise.

As their caregiver, you can help them make diet changes that strengthen their respiratory system and improve their overall health. Here are some helpful tips to get them started.

<sup>12</sup> [www.healthcentral.com/slideshow/9-important-medical-devices-managing-copd](http://www.healthcentral.com/slideshow/9-important-medical-devices-managing-copd)

<sup>13</sup> [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6311385/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6311385/)



BODY

### Diet and Nutrition Tips <sup>14,15</sup>

1. Eat proteins at least twice a day to build strong respiratory muscles.
2. Add foods that are rich in vitamin D, which is necessary for good lung health.
3. Incorporate 20–30 grams of fiber each day to prevent bloating and lower cholesterol.
4. Eat four to six small meals to reduce pressure on their diaphragm and allow their lungs to inhale/exhale air easier.
5. Include foods high in omega-3 fatty acids, which can reduce lung inflammation.
6. Drink six to eight 8 oz. glasses of water per day to keep mucus thin and easier to clear out.
7. Limit sodium which causes swelling and impacts breathing.
8. Take a multi-vitamin with calcium and vitamin D, to combat long-term use of steroids.

Be sure to discuss dietary options with your loved one's physician prior to making any changes. See the Appendix for some [nutritious food choices](#).

Another way you can help your loved one with dietary changes is to assist them with meal planning, grocery shopping and food preparation. Your encouragement and support will not only motivate them to make positive changes in their diet, it will also help them conserve energy so they can eat a balanced meal without feeling fatigued or short of breath.

14 [www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/living-with-copd/nutrition](http://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/living-with-copd/nutrition)

15 [www.everydayhealth.com/copd-pictures/10-best-food-choices-for-copd.aspx](http://www.everydayhealth.com/copd-pictures/10-best-food-choices-for-copd.aspx)



## Importance of Exercise

Exercising with COPD might sound strange since your loved one has breathing issues, but it can actually strengthen their respiratory muscles and enable them to breathe easier. There are a ton of other benefits as well, including:

- Increased energy
- Better sleep
- Weight loss
- Improved use of oxygen
- Stress release
- Reduced anxiety and depression
- Better circulation
- Greater stamina
- Stronger muscles
- More physically fit
- Better mood

The benefits of exercise are outstanding for those with COPD. It not only helps improve their breathing, it has a positive impact on their mind, body and spirit as well. And, it doesn't require strenuous exercise to do so. Moderate exercise, three to four times a week for thirty minutes a day would be a great goal to work towards. It may take some time to work up to this goal, and that's okay. Your loved one can start slow and build up to it. The main thing is, they are moving which gets their blood circulating and helps their heart send oxygen to the rest of their body, while strengthening their respiratory muscles.<sup>16</sup> In every way, it's a win-win.

Choose a form of exercise that your loved one will enjoy. Here are some great options to consider:



**Walking**



**Cycling**



**Stretching**



**Yoga**



**Swimming**



**Water aerobics**

Before they begin, be sure to discuss it with their physician to ensure it aligns well with their plan of care. If your loved one is taking supplemental oxygen, the flow rate will need to be adjusted to ensure safe participation in physical activities.

One way you can support them is to exercise right along with them. The companionship makes it more enjoyable, but it is best to limit talking while exercising to prevent shortness of breath. If starting to exercise on their own feels a bit too daunting, a pulmonary rehabilitation program can be the perfect support system and a positive segue into a healthier lifestyle for your loved one.

With COPD, safety is crucial. If your loved one exhibits any of the following symptoms, they should NOT exercise:<sup>17</sup>

- Nausea
- Chest pain
- Breathing difficulties
- Low oxygen
- Fever or infection

## Breathing Exercises and Relaxation Techniques

The shortness of breath that comes with COPD can create immense anxiety in your loved one, which makes it even more difficult to breathe. But, there are some proven strategies that can help them calm their breathing and relax when those moments come. As a caregiver, it's important to know what to do to help them when shortness of breath occurs. Here are some breathing exercises and relaxation techniques that can help:

- **Pursed lip breathing:** A breathing exercise that helps ease their breathing by reducing the number of breaths they take and keeping their airways open longer.<sup>18</sup> Here's how:

<sup>16</sup> [www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/living-with-copd/physical-activity](http://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/living-with-copd/physical-activity)

<sup>17</sup> [www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/living-with-copd/physical-activity](http://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/living-with-copd/physical-activity)

<sup>18</sup> [www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/wellness/breathing-exercises](http://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/wellness/breathing-exercises)



1. Breathe in through your nose with your mouth closed for two seconds.
  2. Then, breathe out through your mouth with pursed lips for four seconds.
- **Belly breathing:** Also known as diaphragmic breathing, it is similar to pursed lip breathing, only there is attention given to the inflating and deflating of your belly. It is a method of retraining the diaphragm to do its job of filling and emptying the lungs.<sup>19</sup> Here's how:
    1. Put your hands lightly on your belly.
    2. Breathe in through your nose with your mouth closed for two seconds, watching your belly as it inflates like a balloon with air.
    3. Then, breathe out slowly through your mouth with pursed lips for four to six seconds.
  - **Relaxing music or sounds:** Sitting or lying down with their head elevated while listening to peaceful music or soothing sounds (ocean, birds, etc.) is a great way to help them relax.
  - **Yoga:** Low-impact yoga can help reduce stress and anxiety, lower blood pressure, and improve their physical and emotional health. It involves physical postures (asanas) and breathing techniques (pranayamas) that can help your loved one relax.<sup>20</sup>
  - **Pet therapy:** Enjoying time with a family pet can also bring a sense of calmness and joy to your loved one when anxiety is high, as long as they don't have allergies to pet dander.

### Caring for Their Body, Controlling COPD

Caring for a loved one with COPD involves understanding their disease and implementing the care regimens that enable their lungs to function at their best, so they can breathe easier. Taking good care of their body is the key to controlling COPD so they can continue to live a quality life. It involves:

- Complying with their treatment plan
- Helping them manage shortness of breath
- Supporting them in their effort to quit smoking
- Attending a pulmonary rehabilitation program
- Taking prescribed medication and therapy correctly
- Helping with tasks and efforts to conserve energy
- Making dietary changes that improve their breathing
- Participating in approved exercises with them regularly
- Encouraging breathing and relaxation exercises

In the next section of this guide, we'll look at ways you can help care for your loved one's spirit as they face the emotional and mental challenges that come with COPD.

<sup>19</sup> [www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/wellness/breathing-exercises](http://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/wellness/breathing-exercises)

<sup>20</sup> [www.healthline.com/health/copd/yoga](http://www.healthline.com/health/copd/yoga)





## SPIRIT

*COPD can be frightening, but when your loved one knows you are in this together, it eases their anxiety and lifts their heart amid the challenges. This is what care for the spirit is all about.*

### Caring For Their Emotions

When a loved one is diagnosed with COPD, it can be overwhelming. The realization that their lungs are damaged and their ability to breathe will be a challenge going forward is a lot to take in. More than ever, they need the love and support of their family and friends as they walk this difficult road. As a caregiver, you can encourage them with the changes they need to make and help them when they are feeling down. The difference you can make is monumental!

Sometimes, the best approach is the direct approach. Rather than dismissing negative feelings and emotions, here are some positive ways you can address them:

- Talk with them about COPD and what it means
- Ask them to share how they are feeling and offer support
- Combat their fears and anxieties with real solutions
- Reassure them, they are not alone; you're in this together
- Focus on the good things that can come from these changes
- Encourage them to journal their feelings
- Let them know, they can talk to you about anything
- Put a plan in place to move forward positively

### Recognizing Signs of Anxiety and Depression

The range of emotions that COPD brings can be daunting. The fear of not being able to breathe can paralyze a person emotionally and send them to a dark place. And, for those with COPD, anxiety causes them to breathe faster which can cause or intensify shortness of breath. As a caregiver, it's important to know how to recognize the signs of oncoming anxiety, fear or depression and counter it with calming strategies that de-escalate it.

#### Signs of Anxiety:<sup>21</sup>

- Nervous or restless
- Sense of panic
- Increased heart rate
- Chest tightening
- Rapid breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating
- Trembling
- Tired or weak
- Inability to concentrate
- Difficulty sleeping
- Worrisome

#### Signs of Depression:<sup>22</sup>

- Sadness or hopelessness
- Irritability and frustration
- Loss of interest in things
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Lack of energy or fatigue
- No appetite or overeating
- Anxiety or restlessness
- Slowness in speech and thought
- Sense of worthlessness or guilt
- Trouble concentrating
- Unexplained pain
- Suicidal thoughts

If you notice your loved one showing signs of anxiety, encourage them to do some breathing or relaxation exercises to calm their mind and slow their breathing. And, if they are exhibiting signs of depression, take time to sit and talk with them. Discussing their feelings and unpacking what is bottled up inside can bring some relief and allow them to

<sup>21</sup> [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anxiety/symptoms-causes/syc-20350961](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anxiety/symptoms-causes/syc-20350961)

<sup>22</sup> [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20356007](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20356007)

*"While COPD may change the way they live life,  
it doesn't mean they can't continue to enjoy life."*





SPIRIT

manage their emotions better. It's important that they know, it's normal for a person with COPD to be battling anxiety and depression, and they are not alone. If the issues go deeper, encourage your loved one to speak with a counselor to work through them. Most importantly, if you suspect they may be thinking of harming themselves in any way, inform their physician immediately so they can get the timely help and support they need.

### **Incorporating Activities that Bring Joy**

While COPD may change the way they live life, it doesn't mean they can't continue to enjoy life. As a caregiver, you can look for ways to bring happiness to their health journey. Purposing to add joy to each day is an integral part of Interim HealthCare's HomeLife® Enrichment (HLE) philosophy of care. It doesn't need to be anything fancy, it can be simple things such as:

- Taking a walk or bike ride together
- Finding new recipes they like that fit their diet
- Joining in on a favorite activity or hobby
- Spending quality time with friends and family
- Reading a book and discussing it together
- Journaling about life, family, hopes and dreams
- Exploring virtual travel, museums or concerts

COPD impacts so much more than their lungs—it affects their mind, body, spirit and family. To achieve the best health outcomes, you must take a holistic approach to care. Even if they're doing everything right physically, if they are sinking emotionally, managing their COPD will be a constant battle.

### **COPD Support Groups**

No one understands what your loved one is going through better than someone who is walking the same road. A great way to inspire them in their health journey is to encourage them to join a COPD support group. By connecting with others who know the ups and downs of it firsthand, they can find a community that will motivate them when it's hard and where they can help others facing similar challenges. Here are a few COPD support groups they can connect with either in-person or online:<sup>23</sup>

- [Better Breathers Club](#): In-person support group meetings providing education, coping strategies, resources and support to those living with COPD and other lung diseases.
- [Better Breathers Club Network](#): Nationwide, online support program offering education, resources, support and connections to others living with COPD.
- [Living with COPD Community on Inspire](#): Online support community where you can connect with others, share experiences, learn about COPD and ask questions.
- [Lung HelpLine](#): Helpline staffed by registered nurses, respiratory therapists and certified tobacco treatment specialists, answering questions about COPD and offering support seven days a week.

Sometimes, the best way to lift a person's spirit is to encourage them to look past their own struggles and help someone else. Being part of a community that cares will allow your loved one to find the support they need to remain strong so they can help strengthen others.

In the final section of this guide, we will look at care for the family and the important part they play in helping your loved one successfully manage their COPD.

<sup>23</sup> [www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/living-with-copd/finding-support](http://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/living-with-copd/finding-support)

***"When family members are there to support their loved one in their health journey, it makes all the difference."***





## FAMILY

Care for the family involves educating, guiding and supporting those caring for a loved one with COPD. It fosters understanding, improves overall outcomes and encourages self-care.

### Family Plays a Key Part In the Care Process

When a loved one is diagnosed with COPD, they will need to make some life changes to get things under control—and family plays an important part. When family members are there to support their loved one in their health journey, it makes all the difference. Understanding COPD, its symptoms and how to respond is critical to being able to help them when they need it most.

Supporting families who are caring for a loved one with COPD is all part of our holistic model of care. At Interim HealthCare, we know it's not easy but we're here to help with the resources, tools and support you need to help your loved manage their disease. When family is onboard with the regimens of care that COPD requires, their loved one will be better equipped to follow their care plan, control their symptoms and live a quality life.

### Education and Training Leads to Better Results

One of the most practical ways family can help is to learn the fundamentals of COPD care. When you and your family understand COPD and the specific care protocols required to manage it, you'll be a second layer of support to your loved one as they make the changes necessary to breathe easier.

Here are some of the essentials of COPD care that families need to know:

- What COPD is and how it affects their life
- Symptoms of COPD and how to manage them
- Signs of a flare-up and what to do
- Following prescribed medication regimens
- Knowing how to properly use inhalers
- Understanding how to safely assist with oxygen
- Ways to help them conserve energy
- What foods fit in their prescribed diet
- Breathing exercises that help with shortness of breath
- How exercise can help their breathing
- Importance of keeping doctor appointments



### Assisting with Medication and Oxygen

Everyday care for your loved one may involve assisting with prescribed medication and supplemental oxygen and other daily support needs. At Interim HealthCare, we understand that some of their care needs can be intimidating for family so we offer the education, information and resources you need to confidently care for them, including:

- Knowledge of medication and how each one helps
- Difference between maintenance and rescue inhalers and how to use them
- What's a nebulizer and how to use it
- Safety protocols for storing and using oxygen
- How to assist your loved one with supplemental oxygen



## Recognizing Signs of a Flare-up

The most critical aspect of care is recognizing and responding to a flare-up, known as a COPD exacerbation. This is a serious situation that requires immediate medical attention. For this reason, any family members involved in your loved one's care should know the signs of a flare-up and what to do to manage the situation. If their physician is not available, they will need to go to the nearest hospital emergency room to ensure their safety.

Their doctor should have an emergency plan in place for COPD exacerbations. Family members should follow their plan which typically includes the use of a rescue inhaler or oral medication as well as supplemental oxygen if they've been prescribed it. In addition, pursed lip breathing or belly breathing can help with shortness of breath and anxiety. Knowing what to do and acting quickly is vital.

## Keeping a Close Eye on Their Emotional Well-being

Depression and anxiety are common struggles among COPD patients. The anticipation of not being able to breathe has a tendency to evoke fear and anxiety in those who have the disease. Moreover, the inability to do the things they once could without exhaustion and breathlessness can make them susceptible to depression. These emotional and mental issues can make managing their symptoms near impossible—but family can help. Those closest to them will notice subtle changes in their mood or behavior. If you do, notify their physician promptly so they can get the care and support they need.

## Informing Their Doctor of Health Changes

Another critical part of the care equation is keeping your loved one's physician apprised of their health status and any changes that may occur. It's a simple thing to do that can have a significant bearing on their ability to breathe comfortably. Any family members involved in their care should have their doctor's contact information handy so they can communicate any issues in a timely manner. And, when accompanying a loved one to an appointment, keeping a log of any changes can ensure necessary adjustments to medication and care are made.

## Checklist for COPD Care

- Help them quit smoking (if applicable)
- Remove toxic/chemical products from their home
- Make sure indoor air in their home is clean
- Avoid secondhand smoke, pollution and other triggers
- Make sure they have their rescue inhaler at all times
- Ensure they take medication as prescribed
- Encourage them to exercise regularly
- Assist them with prescribed oxygen when needed
- Help them with shopping and chores that deplete energy
- Organize their home for better energy conservation
- Keep a log of health changes, needs or questions
- Make sure they keep doctor appointments
- Ensure they have prescription refills when needed
- Be aware of signs of depression or anxiety
- Be prepared when signs of a flare-up occur
- When short of breath, lead them in breathing exercises
- Reassure them, they are not alone and they can depend on you



FAMILY

## COPD is serious, but we're here to support you.

Breathing is an essential part of life, but lung disease can make it difficult. When a family member is diagnosed with COPD, they will need to make some life changes to get their symptoms under control.

Caregivers play a significant part in the care process. It starts with understanding COPD, what triggers it and how to manage it. Our COPD Caregiver's Guide is packed with important information that can help you, so you can help them. Since 1966, Interim HealthCare has been providing the expert resources, knowledge and support COPD patients need to manage their condition and live a quality life.

As the nation's first home care provider, we understand the challenges your loved one is facing and we'll be here to help however we can. Our COPD program is founded on our HomeLife Enrichment® philosophy of care, engaging their mind, body, spirit and family to deliver the most comprehensive and personalized level of care.

When breathing is hard, it impacts every facet of life. As a caregiver, you can be the support they need to stay strong and carry on when their disease is debilitating. But, you are not alone. Interim HealthCare will be the support you need to be the compassionate and capable caregiver they need.

To learn more about our COPD program, contact one of our offices and let us know how we can help you. Visit us online at [www.interimhealthcare.com](http://www.interimhealthcare.com) to find an office near you!



## COPD Emergency Information

EMERGENCY PLAN INSTRUCTIONS FROM DOCTOR	
EMERGENCY CONTACTS	
Name	Name
Phone	Phone
HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS AND PHYSICIANS	
Name	Name
Phone	Phone
Type/Specialty	Type/Specialty
MEDICATION AND DOSAGE	
Medication	Dosage
Medication	Dosage
Medication	Dosage
Medication	Dosage
Medication	Dosage
Medication	Dosage
HEALTHCARE INSURANCE INFORMATION	
Plan Name	Member ID
Member Phone	Group Number



## COPD Goals Worksheet

<b>Goal #1</b>	
<b>Benefits</b>	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
<b>Actions</b>	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.

<b>Goal #2</b>	
<b>Benefits</b>	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
<b>Actions</b>	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.

<b>Goal #3</b>	
<b>Benefits</b>	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
<b>Actions</b>	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.

## COPD Diet and Nutrition Guide

Here are some great food choices that are rich in protein, fiber, vitamin D and omega-3 fatty acids:<sup>24</sup>

### High-Protein Foods

- Milk
- Cheese
- Eggs
- Dried beans
- Nuts
- Fish
- Poultry
- Meat

### High-Fiber Foods

- Oats
- Quinoa
- Brown rice
- Whole wheat bread
- Whole grain pastas
- Whole grain cereals
- Fresh fruits & vegetables
- Legumes like beans, peas & lentils

### Vitamin D-Rich Foods

- Almond milk
- Egg yolks
- Vitamin D- fortified milk, yogurt & dairy
- Vitamin D-fortified orange juice
- Canned sardines
- Canned light tuna
- Uncooked mushrooms
- Salmon
- Flounder
- Tilapia

### Omega-3 Fatty Acid-Rich Foods

- Cod
- Canned light tuna
- Atlantic mackerel
- Salmon
- Sardines
- Walnuts
- Flaxseed & flaxseed oil
- Green leafy vegetables
- Eggs fortified with omega-3 fatty acids
- Canola oil



<sup>24</sup> [www.everydayhealth.com/copd-pictures/10-best-food-choices-for-copd.aspx](http://www.everydayhealth.com/copd-pictures/10-best-food-choices-for-copd.aspx)





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Founded in 1966, Interim HealthCare is the nation's first home care and healthcare staffing company. A recognized leader in their industry, Interim HealthCare understands the importance of providing quality care in a place that's ideal for the individuals they serve. Distinguished by their HomeLife Enrichment® signature standard of care, they engage the mind, body, spirit and family in a personalized plan of care that ensures an optimal experience for their clients.

Operating through a network of more than 300 locally owned franchises, Interim HealthCare offers a comprehensive range of home care, hospice and healthcare staffing solutions. From skilled nurses and therapists to aides and companions, they provide an average of 25 million hours of home care to 190,000 people every year.

**[interimhealthcare.com](https://www.interimhealthcare.com)**