



Living with COPD:
Your Guide to Treatment,
Support and Daily Life



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Living with COPD

Being diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) changes your life physically and emotionally. There is no cure for COPD, but it can be managed and treated by working with your healthcare team to develop a treatment plan to keep your COPD under control. Along with quitting smoking, staying up to date with vaccinations, following your treatment plan and regularly seeing your healthcare provider, there are lifestyle changes that can help you stay more active and improve your quality of life. Having COPD can affect your ability to work and do things you enjoy. What seem like simple daily tasks can become difficult.

COPD is not the same for everyone, and it may change over time. Your health care providers can help you come up with the COPD management plan that works best for you.

How to Manage Lifestyle Change

Treatment Plan (Care Plan/Action Plan)

- Work closely with your health care providers. Your eternalHealth Care Management team will work with you and your clinical team to build a treatment plan that works for you.
- Follow your COPD treatment plan. This plan includes:
 - Instructions about activities, exercises, diet, medicines, how to use respiratory inhalers and/or nebulizers appropriately, what to do when COPD flares up, and when to call your health care provider.
 - Your Provider may order a pulmonary rehabilitation program. In pulmonary rehab, you will learn about COPD, do exercises for fitness and breathing, and get support from health care providers and other people who have COPD.



Adjusting to Changes

COPD may limit the things you can do, but you can make changes that will help you cope with the disease progression.

- Ask for help when you need it. Getting support from friends, family, and your health care team is an important part of managing the condition.
- Plan your daily tasks to conserve energy and prioritize what needs to get done.
- Follow your treatment plan, stay up to date with your vaccines and see your provider frequently to stay on top of your wellness.
- Maintain a healthy weight and eat a healthy diet.
- Avoid smoke and pollution.
- Try to get regular exercise as prescribed by a health care provider or pulmonary rehab team. Exercising can help COPD, even if you are a bit short of breath.
- Take steps to prevent infection and protect your lungs:
 - Wash your hands often and avoid being in crowds.
 - Stay away from friends and family members who are sick.
 - Check your local air quality each day, and stay out of areas where air pollution is likely.

How to Recognize Changes in Your Condition

COPD is a progressive disease. Symptoms of COPD often don't appear until significant lung damage has occurred, and they usually worsen over time, particularly if cigarette smoke exposure continues. It is important to let your health care team know if your COPD is getting worse. Your treatment plan may need to be updated.

Signs and Symptoms of COPD:

- Increased shortness of breath: difficulty breathing during daily activities or at rest
- Cough: a cough that does not go away or worsens over time
- Wheezing: a whistling sound when breathing
- Fatigue: tiredness
- Chest tightness: a feeling of pressure or tightness in the chest
- Loss of ability to exercise or perform daily activities, like climbing stairs
- Frequent exacerbations or flare ups: sudden worsening of symptoms that last for 2 days or more
- Signs of depression or anxiety
- Blue coloration of your lips or fingernail beds





Managing Emotions and Stress

Many individuals with COPD experience feelings of sadness, fear and worry, which can indicate stress. Prolonged stress and anxiety can make COPD worse and lead to depression. Taking care of your emotional health does more than just improve your mood. Research shows that managing anxiety and depression can increase your ability to continue with your COPD treatment plan, improve your physical health and reduce your medical costs.

It is important to recognize the triggers to your stress.

Things to watch for:

- Feeling sad or worried more often or most of the time.
- Having less energy and losing interest in pleasurable activities.
- Changes in your appetite or sleeping patterns.
- Being easily angered or irritated.
- Having unexplained aches and pains, digestive problems, or headaches.

Seek Immediate Help If You Have:

- Thoughts of suicide, death, or self-harm
- Thoughts of harming others

Contact Emergency Services Right Away By:

- Going to your nearest emergency department, or
- Calling 911 (U.S.)
- Calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1 (800) 273-8255 or 988 (Available 24/7)

If You're a Veteran:

- Call 988, then press 1 (Available 24/7)
- Text the Veterans Crisis Line: 838255

Things You Can Do At Home

Eating and Drinking

- Eat foods that are high in fiber, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and beans. Limit foods that are high in fat and processed sugars, such as fried or sweet foods.
- Follow a balanced diet and maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight or underweight can make COPD worse.
- Drink enough fluid to keep your urine pale yellow.
- If you drink alcohol limit how much you have.

Lifestyle

If you smoke, the most important thing that you can do is to stop smoking. Continuing to smoke will cause the disease to progress faster.

- Do not use any products that contain nicotine or tobacco. These products include cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and vaping devices, such as e-cigarettes. If you need help quitting, ask your health care provider.

- Avoid exposure to things that irritate your lungs, such as smoke, chemicals, and fumes.
- Stay connected with family, friends and community groups.

Activity

- Balance exercise and rest. Take short walks. This is important to improve blood flow and breathing.
- Do exercises that include controlled breathing with body movement.
- Pace yourself throughout the day. It is important to rest **before** you become fatigued.
- Try not to do too many “heavy” tasks all in one day. For example, avoid doing your laundry, grocery shopping, and going to an appointment all in one day. Space these activities out.



General Instructions

- Get a good night's sleep and rest periods throughout the day, if feeling tired.
- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider.
- Take vitamin and protein supplements as told by your health care provider or dietitian.
- Practice good oral hygiene and see your dental care provider regularly. An oral infection can also spread to your lungs.
- Make sure you receive all the vaccines that your health care provider recommends.
- Keep all follow-up visits. **This is important.**
- Pursed lip breathing is an exercise that helps you slow down your breathing so you can inhale and exhale more air. Practice pursed lip breathing daily until it becomes natural for you to use.
- Communicate with your healthcare team often.



Your Next Steps

Taking action is the best way to manage your COPD and improve your quality of life. Here's how to get started:

- 1. Schedule an appointment** with your healthcare provider to review your current treatment plan and discuss any symptoms or concerns.
- 2. Check your vaccine status** — make sure you're up to date on all recommended vaccinations, including flu and pneumonia vaccines.
- 3. Review your medications** — understand how to use your inhalers and/or nebulizers correctly. Ask your healthcare provider if you're unsure.
- 4. Learn about your benefits** — Visit [eternalHealth.com/Forms-Documents](https://eternalhealth.com/forms-documents) or call Member Services at **1 (800) 680-4568 (TTY 711)** to understand your coverage and available resources.

Oct 1 - Mar 31: 8am to 8pm local time, 7 days a week

Apr 1 - Sep 30: 8am to 8pm local time, Monday - Friday

Ongoing Steps:

- 1. Join a support community** — whether it's a COPD support group (online or in-person), a fitness class, or connecting with friends and family who understand your journey.
- 2. Start moving gradually** — talk with your doctor about a safe exercise plan. Even short daily walks can improve your breathing and overall health.
- 3. Practice stress management** — try breathing exercises, meditation, or other activities that bring you joy and help you manage emotions.
- 4. Monitor your symptoms** — keep track of changes in your breathing, energy levels, and mood. Report any worsening symptoms to your healthcare team right away.

We're Here to Support You

eternalHealth Care Management Line

We are here for you to support you through every step of your health and wellness journey.

1 (800) 787-5076

9am - 5pm EST, Monday - Friday

eternalHealth Urgent 24-Hour Hotline

When you need us outside business hours, we're still here for you.

1 (800) 892-1361

24 Hours, 7 Days a Week

Visit eternalHealth.com/HealthyYou for more resources and support.





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