



[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → Day to day with COPD

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Day to day with COPD

Your doctor gave you the news: you have COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease). There is no cure, but there are things you can do every day to keep COPD from getting worse, to protect your lungs, and to stay healthy.

Manage Your Days

Having COPD can sap your energy. These simple changes can make your days easier and preserve your strength.

- Ask for help when you need it.
- Give yourself more time for daily activities.
- Take breaks to catch your breath when you need to.
- Learn pursed lip breathing.
- Stay physically and mentally active.
- Set up your house so things you use every day are easily within reach.
- Avoid going up and down the stairs multiple times per day.

Learn how to recognize and manage COPD flare-ups.

Clear the Air

Your lungs need clean air. So if you smoke, the best thing you can do for your lungs is quit smoking. Talk with your health care provider about ways to quit. Ask about support groups and other stop-smoking strategies.

Even secondhand smoke can cause further damage. So ask other people not to smoke around you, and if possible, quit altogether.

You should also avoid other forms of pollution like car exhaust and dust. On days when air pollution is high, close the windows and stay inside if you can.

Also, stay inside when it is too hot or too cold.

Eat Well

Your diet affects COPD in several ways. Food gives you fuel to breathe. Moving air in and out of your lungs takes more work and burns more calories when you have COPD.

Your weight also affects COPD. Being overweight makes it harder to breathe. But if you are too thin, your body will have a hard time fighting illnesses.

Tips for eating well with COPD include:

- Eat small meals and snacks that give you energy, but do not leave you feeling stuffed. Large meals may make it harder for you to breathe.
- Drink water or other liquids throughout the day. About 6 to 8 cups (1.5 to 2 liters) a day is a good goal. Drinking plenty of fluids helps thin mucus so it is easier to get rid of it.
- Eat healthy proteins like low-fat milk and cheese, eggs, meat, fish, and nuts.
- Eat healthy fats like olive or canola oils and soft margarine. Ask your provider how much fat you should eat a day.
- Limit sugary snacks like cakes, cookies, and soda.
- If needed, limit foods like beans, cabbage, and fizzy drinks if they make you feel full and gassy.

If you need to lose weight:

- Lose weight gradually.
- Replace 3 large meals a day with several smaller meals. That way you won't get too hungry.
- Talk with your provider about an exercise plan that will help you burn calories.

If you need to gain weight, look for ways to add calories to your meals:

- Add a teaspoon (5 milliliters) of butter or olive oil to vegetables and soups.
- Stock your kitchen with high-energy snacks like walnuts, almonds, and string cheese.
- Add peanut butter or mayonnaise to your sandwiches.
- Drink milkshakes with high-fat ice cream. Add protein powder for an added boost of calories.

Exercise

Exercise is good for everyone, including people with COPD. Being active can build your strength so you can breathe easier. It can also help you stay healthier for longer.

Talk to your provider about what kind of exercise is right for you. Then start slow. You may only be able to walk a short distance at first. Over time, you should be able to go longer.

Ask your provider about pulmonary rehabilitation. This is a formal program where specialists teach you to breathe, exercise, and live well with COPD.

Try to exercise for at least 15 minutes, 3 times a week.

If you become winded, slow down and rest.

Stop exercising and call your provider if you feel:

- Pain in your chest, neck, arm or jaw
- Sick to your stomach
- Dizzy or lightheaded

Sleep

A good night's sleep can make you feel better and keep you healthier. But when you have COPD, certain things make it harder to get enough rest:

- You might wake up short of breath or coughing.
- Some COPD medicines make it hard to sleep.
- You might have to take a dose of medicine in the middle of the night.

Here are some safe ways to sleep better:

- Let your provider know you are having trouble sleeping. A change in your treatment might help you sleep.
- Go to bed at the same time every night.
- Do something to relax before you go to bed. You might take a bath or read a book.
- Use window shades to block outside light.
- Ask your family to help keep the house quiet when it is time for you to sleep.
- Do not use over-the-counter sleep aids. They can make it harder to breathe.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your provider if your breathing is:

- Getting harder
- Faster than before

- Shallow, and you cannot get a deep breath

Also call your provider if:

- You need to lean forward when sitting in order to breathe easily
- You are using muscles around your ribs to help you breathe
- You are having headaches more often
- You cannot speak more than a few words without getting short of breath
- You feel sleepy or confused
- You have a fever
- You are coughing up dark mucus
- You are coughing up more mucus than usual
- Your lips, fingertips, or the skin around your fingernails, are blue

Alternative Names

COPD - day to day; Chronic obstructive airways disease - day to day; Chronic obstructive lung disease - day to day; Chronic bronchitis - day to day; Emphysema - day to day; Bronchitis - chronic - day to day

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