



How can I prevent exacerbations happening?

Most exacerbations are caused by infections. These infections are often picked up from people around you who have a “cough and a cold”. Some people have frequent flare-ups and

others no more than anyone else without COPD. Most flare-ups happen during the colder seasons and therefore it is more likely you will get an exacerbation during the autumn or winter.

If you are at risk of having frequent flare-ups you might benefit from keeping a spare course of antibiotics and steroid tablets at home in case of an exacerbation. If you are experiencing an exacerbation it is essential you recognise your symptoms and learn how to act accordingly.

Flu-Jab and Pneumonia Jab

It is recommended that all patients with a chronic lung condition get both their flu-jab and their pneumonia vaccination.



Useful contact numbers

COPD Team:
01206 286547

Pulmonary Rehabilitation Service:
01255 206263


British Lung Foundation
0207-8315831

Breathe Easy Colchester & Clacton:
01206-515015
(<http://www.essexinfo.net/breathe-easy-colchester>)

My COPD nurses name:
.....

On request, this publication can be supplied in alternative formats including large print, Braille, audio tape and disk. We can also translate the Information into languages other than English.

CODE



WHAT IS AN EXACERBATION OF COPD?



AND HOW TO MANAGE ONE



What is an exacerbation?

An exacerbation (or Flare up) of your COPD is a worsening of symptoms that requires changes to your treatment.

Many people with COPD, especially in the winter, have times when they find it harder to breathe than normal. Often this is accompanied by a cough with yellow or green phlegm.

What causes an exacerbation?

Many exacerbations are caused by an infection, although air pollution and changes in the weather can also cause them.

How do I recognise an exacerbation?

The symptoms you may experience include:

- Increase in coughing
- Changes in the amount, thickness and/or colour of your phlegm
- Increase in breathlessness
- Chest tightness
- Wheezing
- Loss of appetite
- Increase of tiredness

If 2 or more of these symptoms persist for 48 hours or more, then you are probably experiencing an exacerbation/flare-up of your lung condition.

What do I do when I have an exacerbation?

Whenever you have an exacerbation you should seek contact with your doctor or practice nurse. If you are known to the COPD team then you may also contact them directly.

To help you get over your exacerbation:

- Your doctor may need to prescribe you some antibiotics and/or steroids
- You may also need to take your reliever medication (puffers or nebulisers) more often to ease your breathing, and you may need to continue this until your breathing becomes easier again.
- During this “flare-up” you must continue to drink plenty of fluids and eat little and often.
- Balance activity with plenty of rests. Do as little as possible, but get out of bed whenever you can during the daytime. Sitting out in a chair is better for your recovery than lying in bed.



What if I need to go to hospital?



If an ambulance is called for you or a doctor refers you to the hospital you are likely to be taken to the Accident & Emergency (A&E) department. Here you will be assessed by a doctor and depending on how much difficulty you have with your breathing you will either be treated in A&E and sent home or you will be taken to a ward. You are likely to get referred to the COPD Team. This is a team of Health professionals specialised in caring for COPD patients. They may be able to support you further at home.

How long does an exacerbation last?

Normally, patients make a full recovery within about a week/fortnight. Most people can be treated at home. On some occasions, if the exacerbation is particularly bad, a short stay in hospital may be needed.