



FALL 2021

COPD

Information to help you improve your health from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama

COPD is a chronic, progressive disease which can make it hard to breathe easily. Symptoms include coughing, increased mucus production, feeling a tightness in your chest and back, shortness of breath, wheezing, and discomfort in your airways.

BE A PARTNER IN YOUR COPD CARE

You have a team working hard to keep you well but they can't do it alone. You are an important member of the team. Be open and honest when you talk to doctors, nurses, or others. Let them know about problems you are having with the treatment plan or symptoms.

Understand your chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and what steps you need to manage it. Ask plenty of questions. This will help you make better decisions on a day to day basis. The more active you are in your care, the better the outcome will be.

FOLLOW YOUR CARE PLAN

Daily habits can impact your COPD. Understand the steps listed in your care plan such as:

- Quit smoking.
- Stay away from smoke, dust, and smog.
- Do not spend time in places that are very hot, cold, or high in altitude.
- Reach and keep a healthy weight.
- Exercise regularly.

Ask for help if you are having trouble making these changes. Professionals may have tools to help you. A pulmonary rehabilitation program may also help. They not only teach you what habits are healthy but also show you how to start.

Medicine and treatments can have side effects. Let your care team know about any problems you are having. The team may be able to adjust your treatment or make changes to help you cope.



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IDENTIFY PROBLEMS

No one knows your body like you do. You will be the first to know when something is wrong. Start treatment outlined in your care plan as soon as you feel symptoms worsen.

Let your care team know about symptoms that worsen or do not respond to treatment such as:

- Shortness of breath
- Problems doing day to day tasks
- More or thicker mucus
- An increase in coughing with or without blood
- Ankle swelling
- Problems sleeping
- Lack of hunger
- Your medicine is not helping you
- Confusion or tiredness
- Chest pain

PRACTICE SELF-CARE

A chronic disease can cause a lot of changes in your life. Change can be stressful. You may also withdraw from social events. Both impact your physical and mental health. Share your concerns with your care team. Let them know if anxiety or depression is making day to day tasks hard or you have problems with relationships. Be on the lookout for any of the following:

- Persistent feelings of sadness, anxiety, or emptiness
- Isolation from friends or family
- Hopelessness
- Trouble sleeping, waking up too early, or oversleeping
- Loss of interest in hobbies and activities
- Trouble concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide with or without suicide attempts

Know that these aren't normal. Treatment can help to ease these symptoms. There are also tools that may help you better cope.

STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR CARE TEAM

Open and honest talk with your care team can improve your overall wellness. The earlier you tell your care team about any problems you are having, the better it will be.



Have questions related to your health?

TAKE CONTROL with our exclusive **myBlueHealth** program.

Call **1-833-964-1448** for information and to talk to a clinician.

Email **mybluehealth@bcbsal.org**.

Download the free **Wellframe mobile app**. Enter access code **alwell**.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY WITH COPD

Staying active should be a part of your chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) care plan. It can help your body use oxygen better and ease breathing problems. It can also boost your quality of life and sense of well-being.

GET MEDICAL APPROVAL

Talk to your doctor before you start working out. Your doctor may have you do an exercise test first. It will find out how your lungs work when under stress. This will let you know whether it is safe for you to workout.

Some people are afraid to workout even after their doctor has said it is safe for them to do so. It is normal to be worried, but it will not harm your lungs. The risk of health problems is greater for people who are not active than for those who are. Share any concerns you may have with your doctor.



AIM FOR 30 MINUTES A DAY

Most people with COPD should aim for at least 30 minutes of activity per day on most days of the week. Start slowly and work towards this goal over time. You can break up the activity over the day. For example, you can do three 10-minute sessions.

This type of activity should make your heart rate increase while you are doing it. Over time this makes your body better at using oxygen and decreases stress on lungs. Your heart will also be stronger.

Add strength exercises at least 2 days a week. Body weight exercises, elastic bands, and weights can all be tried. It can help to build lean muscle and strengthen bones. Some exercise may also improve upper body strength.



WARM UP AND COOL DOWN

It is important to get your body and lungs ready to workout. Warm up for at least 5-15 minutes. You can do the same activity but start at a slow pace.

It is equally important to cool down after your workout. Stopping quickly can make you feel lightheaded. Slowly lower the intensity of your workout over the last 5 minutes of your workout.



WATCH FOR SIGNS OF OVEREXERTION

The rated perceived exertion scale (RPE) can help you find out if you are overdoing it. On a scale from 0 to 10, 0 would be easy effort (sitting in a chair) and 10 would be very heavy effort (end of a hard workout). You want to aim for 3-4 on this scale.

You may be doing too much if you have any of these signs:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Leg pain that is not caused by your workout
- Chest pain

If you have any of these signs, then you should slow down. If your symptoms do not get better, then stop what you are doing. If you think you have an emergency, call for emergency medical services right away.





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Eligible members have access
to our free nurse phone lines.

Call **1-833-964-1448** for
more information.

COVID-19 UPDATE

The arrival of the COVID-19 vaccine is a major development in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

The current vaccines provide a **high level of protection** against contracting the virus.

Getting vaccinated will help keep you and your family healthy and safe.

MASK UP. STAY SAFE.

For more information about the COVID-19 vaccine and its availability in your area, contact your physician's office or local pharmacy. Additional COVID-19 topics and how the pandemic could affect you and your family can be found at **www.cdc.gov/COVID19**

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