



COPD: What is it?

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

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, or COPD, is a chronic, progressive disease that makes breathing difficult. Typical symptoms include coughing, increased mucus production, a tight feeling in your chest, shortness of breath, wheezing, and other symptoms related to your lungs and airways.

COPD and You

To help control your COPD symptoms, it's important to stay educated and take proactive steps. In this newsletter you can read how allergies may affect COPD, learn about pulmonary hypertension, and get some tips for the best ways to travel with COPD.

The purpose of this newsletter is to help you control your COPD symptoms and live your best life. We hope you find this information helpful.

Thank you for reading!



This information is provided for general informational purposes. Information contained in this communication is not intended to replace professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified healthcare provider regarding your healthcare needs. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay seeking medical advice because of something you have read in this informational piece. Always check your benefits for coverage information and limitations. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

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People with COPD often notice swelling of their legs and ankles. This is often the result of a condition known as *pulmonary hypertension*.

COPD & Pulmonary Hypertension

What is pulmonary hypertension?

Basically, pulmonary hypertension describes a kind of high blood pressure affecting the right side of the heart and lung arteries.

What causes pulmonary hypertension?

People with COPD often experience a hardening and narrowing of arteries between the heart and lungs. Hard, narrow vessels cause the heart to work harder, which increases the blood pressure in that part of the body. This leads to pulmonary hypertension.

What does pulmonary hypertension do to the body?

Unfortunately, pulmonary hypertension may cause right-sided heart failure, worsen COPD symptoms, and cause swelling in other parts of the body.

Why does pulmonary hypertension cause swelling in legs and ankles?

The hard, narrow arteries may block blood flow, causing blood to back up throughout the body. When this happens, fluids leak out from

the blood into surrounding tissues. Thanks to gravity, these fluids often fall down and stay around the legs and ankles. This kind of swelling is sometimes called *edema*.

Does pulmonary hypertension have any other symptoms?

Yes, people with pulmonary hypertension have shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, extreme tiredness, bluish lips, chest pains, and/or a decrease in appetite.

What treatments are available for pulmonary hypertension?

The best way to reduce swelling from pulmonary hypertension is to treat the underlying condition. You should work with your doctor and create a plan. If you are prescribed medicine, take it as directed. Certain lifestyle changes may help such as reducing salt from your diet, getting enough exercise, and monitoring the types and amounts of fluids you drink. In addition, your doctor may recommend physical therapy or oxygen therapy.

We offer members a support system to help manage any chronic condition, as well as preventive measures to take better care of yourself. Call **1-888-841-5741** for more information on these services.

Traveling with COPD

There are over 11 million Americans with various forms of COPD. While COPD can make many daily activities difficult, it doesn't necessarily make them impossible.

Getting up and getting moving can be great for your overall health and wellbeing. So, if you suffer from cabin fever, get out! Traveling can boost your mood and help you feel better. However, if you have COPD, you may need to take precautions before hitting the road.

Create a plan.

Research the place you want to visit. Does it have a good hospital if you have a flare up? What are their daily temperatures? Colder climates can be uncomfortable when you have COPD.

Pack your medicine.

Remember to pack up an adequate supply of your daily medicines, and keep this with you at all times. Consider packing more medicine than you need just in case your travel time gets extended due to delays or bad weather.

Consider your oxygen needs.

People with various forms of COPD may require supplemental oxygen to feel better. If you benefit from supplemental oxygen, consider taking a portable oxygen concentrator to help you stay mentally alert and energized during your travels.

Check environmental factors.

What is the air quality like where you are visiting? Check the air quality index before taking a trip. Some bigger cities have a lot of smog, exhaust and other pollutants that can worsen your COPD symptoms. Consider visiting scenic rural towns with warm climates.

Create an itinerary.

Decide where you want to go ahead of time and call ahead to ask questions. Are the locations you want to visit handicapped-accessible? Are there elevators so you don't risk getting winded while



TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

It's important to come prepared for every doctor's appointment. If you've been diagnosed with COPD, be sure to ask about:

- Lung function test
- Lifestyle issues such as smoking, diet and exercise

climbing steep stairs? Be sure to schedule some downtime into your days to give you a chance to enjoy a little R&R and so you don't overdo it.

Living with COPD has its challenges, but with proper preparation, you can still satisfy your adventurous side and travel!



COPD and Allergies

Allergic reactions can worsen existing COPD symptoms and cause flare-ups. Here are a few tips to limit your exposure to allergens and help you breathe easier.

Change clothes when you get home. If you've been out and about, change into some clean pajamas or house clothes when you get home. This way you limit the amount of pollen, pet dander or other allergens that may be hiding in the fabric of your clothes.

Vacuum frequently. Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter on carpets, rugs and furniture to remove allergens from surfaces in your home.

Change out those air filters. Use a good filter for your home's air conditioning and heating units. Replace these filters frequently. Don't forget to change out the internal filters in your car as well.



Fix leaks. Standing water is a breeding ground for mold and mildew. Mold and mildew can set off allergic reactions and cause breathing problems.

Limit outdoor activities during peak pollen seasons. Understand your seasonal allergies. Try to find indoor activities to enjoy during certain seasons if you suffer seasonal tree, grass or ragweed allergies.

Check for air quality alerts. Many weather services offer maps and services that can warn you when pollutants or particles in the air may be a problem. Use these services and avoid outdoor activities on bad days.

Consider us your support system.

We're here to help you manage your chronic condition. And we can suggest preventive measures that will help you take better care of yourself.

Connect with your Care Coordinator today.

Call **1-888-841-5741** for more information.

