



mercy care

IMPROVING LUNG HEALTH

Fall/Winter 2021

Keep track of your asthma symptoms

If you have asthma, tracking your symptoms can help you take steps to keep breathing well.

What should you track? Start with:

Daytime symptoms. Note how often your asthma bothers you during the day — and what symptoms you have. Are you coughing or wheezing? Are you short of breath? Is your chest tight?

Nighttime symptoms. Are you ever woken up by asthma? Make a note of how often this happens.

Your inhaler use. How often do you need your quick-relief inhaler? If there's been an increase or you need to refill it more than twice a year, let your doctor know.

How you feel when being active.

Does your asthma act up when you do normal things, like take a walk or climb stairs? That could be a sign it's getting worse.

Your doctor may also ask you to use a peak flow meter and track your results. This device measures how well you're breathing.

Take your notes to each doctor visit — and go over your asthma action plan. It should tell you what to do when your asthma is acting up.

Source: American Lung Association (www.lung.org)

It's not too late!

Flu shots are especially important this year. People at high risk for getting very sick from COVID-19 should get one as soon as possible. If you haven't had yours yet, don't wait.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)

Did you know that you may be able to get Lifeline cell service plus a smartphone at no cost to you? Go to www.MercyCareAZ.org or call Member Services at **1-800-624-3879 (TTY: 711)** and ask about the Assurance Wireless Lifeline program.



Eat well, breathe better

A healthy diet is important for all of us. That's especially true if you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Making the right choices may help you breathe easier.

For instance, eating a good source of protein at least twice a day can help keep the muscles you use for

breathing strong. Good protein sources include:

- Milk and cheese
- Eggs
- Meat, fish and poultry
- Nuts, beans and peas

For some people, eating fewer carbs and more fats is best for breathing. Healthy fats can include things like avocados, nuts and olive oil.

Some people may also need to limit salt (sodium) in their diet.

Ask your doctor what's best for you.

When you're fatigued or full

If COPD affects your appetite or energy, you might feel too tired or full to eat. These tips can help you get the nutrients you need:

- Rest before eating.
- Eat four to six small meals a day rather than three big ones.
- Eat your biggest meals earlier in the day, when you're likely to have more energy.
- Drink water an hour after meals, rather than with it.

Sources: American Dietetic Association (www.eatright.org); American Lung Association (www.lung.org); COPD Foundation (www.copdfoundation.org)

Understanding your asthma medicines

If you have asthma, one key to managing it is to understand your medicines. There are two main types. One controls your symptoms over the long term. The other provides quick relief.

Quick-relief medicines

If your symptoms get worse, these fast-acting medicines can help you breathe again. They often come in inhalers. Some relax the muscles around your airways. Others reduce swelling inside your airways. Your doctor can help you know which type is right for you — and show you how to use it.

Long-term control medicines

Most people with asthma also take a daily medicine. These can help prevent flare-ups. They may relax your

airways and control swelling over time. They often come as pills or inhalers.

Other long-term medicines aim to change how your body responds to allergy triggers. These might be pills — or shots given in your doctor's office.

Know your meds

To get the most from your medicines, you need to take them just as your doctor directs. Your asthma action plan can tell you when and how to take them to keep you breathing well.

Sources: American Lung Association (www.lung.org); National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

Avoid things that make COPD worse

Living well with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) means protecting your lungs. What's the best way to do that if you have COPD?

If you smoke, the first — and most important — step is to stop. Ask others not to smoke around you too. If you're having trouble quitting, your doctor can help. There are programs and medicines that can help you break your addiction.

Then do your best to avoid other things that make breathing harder. Those include:

Dust and air pollution. If possible, stay indoors and keep your windows closed when there's lots of pollution or dust outside.

Chemical fumes. Ask your doctor what you can do to lower your risk at work. Do you need to paint or spray for insects at home? Have someone else do those chores. If you can, stay someplace else for a while.

Lung infections. Fight off cold and flu germs by washing your hands often. Get shots to protect you from the flu and pneumonia.



One last tip: Take your COPD medicines exactly as prescribed. That's a must for keeping your lungs working well.

Sources: American Lung Association (www.lung.org); National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

Caregivers: Seek the help you deserve

Need support? Ask your loved one's care manager about services that may be open to you.

4 ways to take charge

If you have a chronic condition, take it step by step:

1. Learn all you can about it.
2. Work with your doctor on a care plan.
3. Take your medications.
4. Aim for healthy habits.

Source: National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (www.niddk.nih.gov)

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