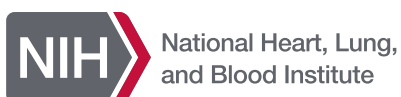




How do I help after a COPD flare-up or hospital stay?

THE **COPD** CAREGIVER'S TOOLKIT



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How do I help after a COPD flare-up or hospital stay?

IN THIS MODULE

- How do I recognize a COPD flare-up?
Or an emergency?
- How can I prepare for a COPD flare-up
or emergency?
- How do I develop a plan for the person
I care for?
- What should I do after the person
I care for has been hospitalized?

HOW DO I RECOGNIZE A COPD FLARE-UP? OR AN EMERGENCY?

COPD flare-ups are also called "exacerbations." They can be scary and confusing. It's important to know what a flare-up looks like. Sometimes COPD flare-ups can be minor, but sometimes they can be severe. Knowing the difference can help you give better care.

Tracking COPD symptoms each day will help you spot a flare-up early

Tracking symptoms is a great tool for spotting a flare-up early. Recognizing a flare-up early is important because it is easier to manage and get under control. Tracking may also give the person you care for the insight to better manage his or her own COPD care. Having a written tracking log that a doctor can review will also help provide helpful information that could lead to changes in treatment or medications.

Antibiotics and COPD medications can shorten the duration of a flare-up

Flare-ups can be caused by lung infection. Talk to your doctor as soon as you think the person you care for may have an infection so that the doctor can determine the most appropriate treatment. Make sure to follow the instructions carefully and fully.

The doctor may also recommend COPD medications to treat the COPD flare-up. Take notes on any new COPD medications the person you care for is given. Practice how to use new COPD medication with a healthcare provider.



Recognize the signs of a COPD flare-up:

- an ongoing or more severe cough;
- a cough that produces a lot of mucus;
- increased shortness of breath, especially with physical activity or when resting;
- wheezing, or a whistling or squeaky sound, when breathing;
- chest tightness;
- cold or flu-like symptoms.

If you see any of these symptoms, call your doctor.



Recognize the signs of a COPD emergency:

- unusually hard to walk or talk (difficulty completing a sentence);
- very fast or irregular heartbeats;
- gray or blue lips or fingernails;
- fast and hard breathing, even when using COPD medication.

If you see any of these symptoms, call 911.

HOW CAN I PREPARE FOR A COPD FLARE-UP OR EMERGENCY?

If you are caring for someone with COPD, flare-ups and emergencies are a possibility. Being prepared for these events will help reduce the stress and impact on you and your family. Here are some tips:

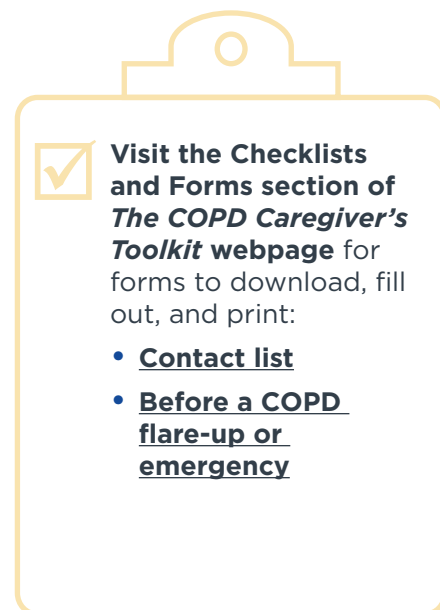
Preparing for a COPD event

- Review with your doctor the signs and symptoms of a COPD flare-up and discuss which symptoms should trigger a call to the doctor.
- Review signs and symptoms of a COPD emergency. Discuss with your doctor when to call 911.
- Make sure all of your emergency contact numbers are current.
- Identify a back-up caregiver for additional support or for when you might be out of town.
- Identify supportive services the person you care for may need following a COPD flare-up:
 - › subacute care facilities
 - › extended care facilities
 - › home health facilities
 - › pulmonary rehabilitation facilities
- Complete a "Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment" (POLST) form and keep copies with the medication list.
- Create a contact list as a key part of preparing for COPD flare-ups and hospital trips.



Ensure both you and your back-up caregiver have the following:

- the emergency plan for the person you care for;
- list of current medications for the person you care for;
- insurance details of the person you care for;
- where the current Power of Attorney (POA) for the person you care for is kept.



HOW DO I DEVELOP A PLAN FOR THE PERSON I CARE FOR?

There may be a time when the person you care for needs someone to act on his or her behalf. During this time, the person may not be able to manage finances or direct healthcare decisions. In such cases, there are documents that you may need to have on hand.

Power of Attorney (POA) form

This may also be called an Advance Directive or Living Will.

A POA form outlines how the person you care for would like medical, personal, or business affairs handled when he or she is unable to do so. It also names who should handle those affairs. By doing so, the person named is designated as having power of attorney. There are medical POAs that outline how medical care should be handled. There are also financial POAs that outline how financial things should be handled.

All adults should have a completed and updated POA. Talk with your loved one and your healthcare providers about completing these forms in advance of a time you may need them. You do not need a lawyer to complete the forms.

Physician Order for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST) form

A POLST form is a medical order that you and your loved one should complete with your doctor. It outlines the specific medical treatments wanted by the person you care for during a medical emergency. Only people with a serious illness or advanced stage of disease who are nearing the end of life are recommended to have this form. However, it is important that you have a discussion with your doctor about when you and the person you care for should complete this form. Keep this form current and with your medical documents. You may need it in the event paramedics are called to your home.



To learn more about POLSTs, visit the website of [National POLST](#).

WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER THE PERSON I CARE FOR HAS BEEN HOSPITALIZED?

If the person you care for has recently been in the hospital, there may be changes in his or her normal routine. For example, after being discharged from the hospital or seeing the doctor for a post-hospitalization visit, the person you care for might get a new care plan or a new prescription.



Managing after hospital discharge

- Prepare in advance any questions you might have for the post-hospitalization visit with the doctor.
- Review the discharge plan with healthcare providers before leaving the hospital.
- Update the medication list, adding any new prescriptions and removing any outdated medications.
- Review any new treatments and the updated medication list with both the person you care for and your backup caregiver.
- Prepare for use of new oxygen, if prescribed.
- Learn about the pulmonary rehabilitation centers available in your area. If you can't find pulmonary rehabilitation centers near you, or have limited access to in-person pulmonary rehabilitation, check out [RHA's Project STRENGTH](#) resources to help you start pulmonary rehabilitation activities at home.
- Learn about the home health companies in your area.
- Update your contacts list to reflect any new providers or services the doctor suggested, such as pulmonary rehabilitation or physical therapy.
- If you have not already done so, set up a Power of Attorney, which outlines the medical preferences of the person you care for, and appoint a person to act on his or her behalf, during a future emergency.
- If you have not already done so, complete a POLST form, that outlines specific medical treatments the person you care for may want during a medical emergency.
- Refresh your understanding of how to use medical devices, such as the nebulizer and inhalers. While your recollection is clear, make notes about how to use these devices in the right way.



Visit the Checklists and Forms section of *The COPD Caregiver's Toolkit* webpage for a form to download, fill out, and print:

- **After a COPD hospitalization**