

# COPD: 'Just the Facts'

## What is COPD?

COPD stands for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It is a condition that keeps the lungs from working normally. The airways in the lungs are blocked and it causes shortness of breath that can interfere with daily life. Emphysema and chronic bronchitis are two types of COPD.

## Self-Management Skills

### If You Smoke — Quit

- Quitting smoking is the best way to keep COPD from getting worse. Breathing will become easier.
- Call UPMC Referral Services toll-free at 1-800-533-UPMC (1-800-533-8762) or the PA Free Quit Line at toll-free 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669).



### Preventing Flare ups

- Wash your hands often to prevent the spread of germs. Keep your hands away from your face.
- Use hand sanitizer between washings, especially when touching things in public that other people have touched.
- Avoid people who have colds or the flu.
- Get a flu shot and pneumonia vaccine.
- Avoid fumes, smoke, and strong odors.
- Stay indoors when air pollution levels and pollen levels are high.
- Cover your mouth and nose when going out in very cold or windy weather.

### Take Medication as Prescribed

- Know the name and dose of each medication, what it is for, and when to take it.
- Remember to always carry your rescue inhaler with you.
- Keep track of how many puffs of the inhaler you use each day and mark it on a calendar.
- Tell your doctor or health care provider if you have problems with any of your medications.



### Conserve Energy and Control Stress

- Sit while doing activities, such as getting dressed or cooking.
- Use a shower chair, if needed.

- Take rests after meals for at least 30 minutes.
- Do one task at a time and rest before starting another task.
- Plan your day so you alternate periods of rest with activity.
- Use a cart with wheels to move groceries, laundry, and other items around the house.

### Exercise and Nutrition

- Ask your doctor about starting a pulmonary rehab program.
- Eat meals that include foods from all the food groups.
- If you are short of breath while eating, try to eat smaller meals more often throughout the day.



### Coping with Shortness of Breath

- Use breathing techniques, such as pursed-lip breathing and diaphragmatic (deep) breathing when you are short of breath.

### Call Your Health Care Provider Right Away if You Have:

- Trouble breathing or catching your breath.
- Trouble doing everyday activities because of your breathing.
- Increased need for your rescue inhaler or short-acting bronchodilator.
- Flu-like symptoms or temperature of 101° F or greater.
- More sputum, or change in sputum color.
- Change in your ability to cough up sputum.
- Swelling of your abdomen (belly), legs, or ankles.
- Feeling of "no strength" or feeling sleepy more often.
- Increase in the need for oxygen.