How to keep you ‘in the driving seat’ of your airways

This is a guide for people with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) - a disease which affects the lungs and the airways.

The guide is easy to understand and will hopefully give you the confidence to take action at an early stage to try to prevent you from having to go to hospital.

Effective and local GP care supported by an educational grant from AstraZeneca
STOP
If you have any of the following symptoms you need to call your GP or phone 999.

- You become very short of breath with no relief after taking your medication.
- You have chest pain.
- You have a high fever.
- You feel agitated and scared or feel sleepy and confused.
- You become more breathless or wheezy than usual.
- You produce more phlegm or it is a different colour than usual.
- You have less energy for activity.
- You are having trouble sleeping or symptoms are keeping you awake.

Take care of yourself by:
- relaxing and controlling your breathing;
- drinking plenty of fluids and eating small amounts of food, regularly; and
- considering other treatments as set out on the opposite page.

Now you are well - you must remember:
- what your breathing is like when you are at rest and when you are active;
- how much phlegm you cough up and what colour it is; and
- what your appetite and sleeping patterns are like.

You should GO and:
- exercise every day;
- drink plenty of fluids and eat a balanced diet;
- take your medication properly – and make sure you don’t run out of it; and
- avoid doing things that make you feel worse.
Below are types of medication you may be able to use when your symptoms are worse

Look out for signs that your breathing or cough is getting worse. Follow this action plan.

**Patient Name _______________________________________________**

- Take action straight away to increase your treatment and take other medication as this may reduce the risk of your breathing getting worse. Your GP may be able to give you antibiotics and steroids to use at home (but you should only use them if your symptoms get worse).
  
  **If you are not sure what to do, contact your doctor or nurse (by phoning them) at their surgery for advice.**

- You might be able to use an extra reliever – to reduce your breathlessness.

  **Your reliever is _____________________________________________**

  Take up to _____________ puffs of ___________________________ every _____ hours.

- You might be able to start your reserve antibiotics if your phlegm changes colour or you produce more because of an infection.

  **Your reserve antibiotic is ____________________________________**

  Take _____________ mg _____ times a day for seven to 14 days according to your doctor’s advice.

- You may be given reserve prednisolone (steroid) tablets to use to reduce inflammation in your lungs when your breathing is bad.

  You should take six 5mg tablets as one dose every day with food, for seven to 14 days.

  **Please make sure you tell your doctor as soon as possible that you have started on a reserve treatment.**
What can I do?

1. **Stop smoking** – The most important step that you can take is to stop smoking, as COPD symptoms get worse if you smoke. Even if your COPD is quite advanced, you will benefit from stopping smoking. For help and advice on giving up smoking, please phone the Stop Smoking Service on 0800 169 169 - or ask your GP about support in your area.

2. **Keep calm** – Breathing difficulties can be frightening. Often feelings of anxiety and panic have a negative effect on your breathing. Sometimes people feel low and fed up and this can make feelings of anxiety worse. Often your doctor can help you with this, so please ask. Dealing with feelings of anxiety can directly help your breathing.

3. **Keep active** – You should try to be as active as possible. Regular exercise can help ease the symptoms of COPD. You should aim to do some exercise for 30 minutes, most days of the week. This could be a 30-minute walk every day or three 10-minute walks every day, around your house or garden.

4. **Eat healthily** – You should try to eat a balanced diet and avoid putting on weight. If you are overweight it means that your lungs will have to work harder and this can make you more breathless. If you are underweight, this can cause your breathing muscles to become weak. If you would like help with your diet, ask your GP or practice nurse.

5. **Immunisation** – We recommend that you have a flu vaccination every year and also a vaccination for pneumonia. Please contact your GP or practice nurse to discuss this.

6. **Keep warm in the winter** – If you get too cold, you can become more vulnerable to chest infections. Wrap up well, even if you only go out for a short amount of time (this means you should wear a hat, scarf and gloves with sensible footwear). It is also important to keep your whole house warm. If this is difficult for you, please phone your local council, or the Warm Front helpline on 0800 316 2814. They will give you advice and you may be entitled to a grant to help you pay for heating your home.

Your out-of-hours GP service is Suffolk Doctors on Call. You can phone them on 01473 299622.