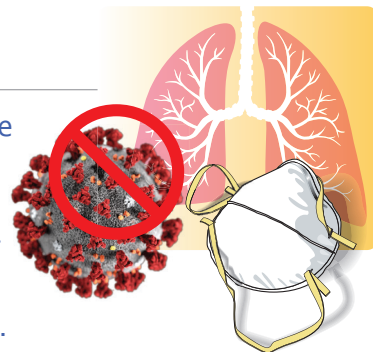


# Managing Your Chronic Lung Disease During the COVID-19 Pandemic

If you have a chronic lung disease, such as COPD or asthma, you are at higher risk of serious illness during the COVID-19 pandemic, so it is more important than ever to take action and protect your lung health. This fact sheet will review tips for how you can protect your lung health, including: how to manage your condition, when to call your healthcare provider, how to avoid illness and managing stress.



## Tip #1: Manage your condition

Take all medicines as prescribed:

- If you have medicines your healthcare provider has prescribed for your lung disease, take all of them as directed. This includes taking your daily control medicines, even if you feel well. Do not stop any medicines without first checking with your healthcare provider. If you have questions about your medicines, contact your healthcare provider.
- Work with your healthcare provider or pharmacist to ensure you are taking your medicines correctly.
- Be sure you have plenty of medicine on hand—at least a 60-90 day supply. Do not delay getting refills. See if you can have your medicines delivered or have someone pick them up for you.
- If you routinely use a nebulizer to take inhaled medicine, you can continue to use it as directed. However, if you are sick with COVID-19 or other respiratory infection, using a nebulizer could increase the risk of infecting others through the mist that you exhale. To avoid this problem, use your nebulizer in a location that is separate from others in your household. You may also talk to your healthcare provider about switching to an inhaler temporarily, or about buying a special nebulizer filter that reduces the amount of mist that you exhale.
- You will need to keep your nebulizer clean to prevent infection. Educational videos on cleaning and using your nebulizers are available on the COPD Foundation website.
- If you smoke or vape, this can increase your risk of more severe illness if you do contract COVID-19. For help with quitting smoking and/or vaping, there are a number of websites that can help you including: the ATS, COPD Foundation, US Centers for Disease Control (CDC), American Lung Association, and NIH Smokefree.

## Tip #2: Follow your action plan

An action plan is a guide that you develop with your healthcare provider to help you manage your chronic disease. This plan can include what you are supposed to do every day (your daily management plan) and what you need to do if you have a change in symptoms (a rescue or sick plan). Your action plan can be a helpful tool to use to manage your lung condition and monitor your symptoms.

- It is very important that you follow your action plan.
  - Watch for any change in symptoms. Remember to tell your healthcare provider if you have a major change in symptoms that prompted you to use your rescue or sick plan.
  - If you do not have an action plan, you can get a free form from the COPD Foundation (for COPD) or the American Lung Association (for Asthma) websites.
  - Work with your healthcare provider to complete an action plan that will help you manage your chronic lung disease, or update your plan when needed.
- If your action plan does not include it, your healthcare provider may also suggest that you:
- ◆ Have regular office visits with your healthcare provider, either in-person or via telemedicine.
  - ◆ Get recommended vaccines as appropriate for you.
  - ◆ Make sure you have all chronic conditions under control, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, in addition to your chronic lung disease.

## Tip #3: Contact your healthcare provider about any unusual symptoms

Sometimes it can be hard to sort out whether you are having a flare-up or an acute illness, such as a virus.

- If you are having a flare-up of your chronic lung disease, you may have symptoms such as increased coughing, coughing up more mucus than usual, fever, chest tightness, breathlessness, increased fatigue, or other symptoms.
- There is likely to be some overlap between the symptoms you normally experience during a flare-up (also called an exacerbation) of your chronic condition and symptoms of COVID-19 illness. One clue is a high fever (> 39.4 degrees Celsius or > 103 degrees Fahrenheit) which is a common symptom of COVID-19, but in general, less likely to happen in an exacerbation. Pay close attention to your symptoms to sort out what is “normal” for you or what seems different. Reach out to your healthcare provider promptly if you are concerned about symptoms that feel “different” than normal, such as shortness of breath.

Most medical practices and hospitals are asking that you call first, rather than just going to the office or emergency room, unless it is a life-threatening situation. Ask if you need to be seen in person.

You may be able to do a telemedicine visit with your provider over the phone or computer from home. More information about telemedicine visits is available on the ATS website. Do not delay getting help if you are concerned about how you are doing.

#### Tip #4: Avoid Infectious Illnesses

There are everyday actions you can take to try to avoid getting sick with COVID-19 or another respiratory infection, including:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Practice social distancing, even if your state has relaxed these measures, and stay away from all crowds. Remember the 6-foot 'bicycle' rule – stay at least as far away as a standard bicycle.
- Stay away from anyone who is sick or may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, even if they do not have symptoms.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces often.
- Wear a mask or face covering when going out in public. Masks or face coverings can provide some protection for you, and for those around you, from breathing in the virus. They also may help remind you not to touch your face while you are out in public. If you have a hard time breathing with a regular mask, consider making your own cloth mask, or use a scarf or bandana to cover your nose and mouth. These options will still offer some protection while allowing some more airflow. Be sure to wash your cloth masks/face coverings regularly.
- Check out how to get household supplies with home delivery or curbside pickup. Or ask for help from family or friends.

For more information about masks/face coverings or other tips to help prevent COVID-19, go to the US Centers for Disease Control website.

#### Tip #5: Manage Stress

The COVID-19 pandemic is a very stressful time for everyone, but especially for people with chronic lung disease or other underlying conditions. Do your best to protect your lung health. You should also try to manage your stress and anxiety by staying informed and staying in touch with friends and loved ones while keeping up with social distancing.

#### Some suggestions:

- Get enough sleep every night. You can read about Healthy Sleep in Adults at the ATS website.
- Eat a healthy balanced diet that matches your needs and tastes. One source of tips is at the COPD Foundation website.
- Do physical activity and exercise to maintain strength and endurance. You can read about Exercise with Lung Disease at the ATS website.
- Take part in virtual support groups such as the two below:
  - ◆ For Asthma, COPD and other chronic lung diseases: [Lung.org/community](https://www.lung.org/community)
  - ◆ For COPD: <https://www.copdfoundation.org/COPD360social/Community/Get-Involved.aspx>
- Staying connected with others is important for your mental well-being
  - ◆ Many people are finding the current situation difficult, so staying in touch could help them too.
  - ◆ Think about how you can stay in touch with friends and family while you are all staying at home—by phone, messaging, video calls or social media—whether it's people you usually see often, or connecting with old friend.

- Do not stay glued to the news.

Try to limit the time you spend watching, reading or listening to coverage of the outbreak. Think about turning off breaking-news alerts on your phone. You could set yourself a specific time to read updates or limit yourself to checking a couple of times a day. Use trustworthy sources and fact-check information from the news, social media or other people.

- Carry on doing things you enjoy.

If we are feeling worried, anxious, lonely or low, we may stop doing things we usually enjoy. Make an effort to focus on your favorite hobby, if it is something you can still do at home. If not, picking something new to learn at home might help. There are lots of free tutorials and courses online, and people are coming up with inventive ways to do things, like hosting online quizzes and music concerts.

- Take time to relax

This can help with difficult emotions and worries, and improve your well-being. Relaxation techniques also can help you deal with feelings of anxiety.

- Keep your mind active

Read, write, play games, do crosswords, complete sudoku puzzles, finish jigsaw puzzles, or try drawing and painting. Whatever it is, find something that works for you. You may want to write a plan for your day or your week.

- If you are working from home, try to get up and get ready in the same way as normal and keep the same hours you would normally work.

More helpful tips for managing stress can be found at the American Lung Association, COPD Foundation, and UK National Health Service websites.

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#### Additional Website Resources

##### American Lung Association

- [Lung.org/COVID-19](https://www.lung.org/COVID-19)

##### American Thoracic Society

- <https://www.thoracic.org/patients>
- <https://www.thoracic.org/patients/patientresources/covid19>

##### CHEST Foundation

- [Chestfoundation.org](https://www.chestfoundation.org)

##### COPD Foundation

- <https://www.copdfoundation.org/Learn-More/I-am-a-Person-with-COPD/Coronavirus-Information.aspx>

##### US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/groups-at-higher-risk.html>

##### For My Lung Health (ATS & CHEST)

- <https://www.formylunghealth.com>

##### NIH Smokefree

- <https://smokefree.gov>

##### UK National Health Service

- <https://www.nhs.uk/>

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