



MDwise

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COPD: Identifying Your Triggers

If you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), your symptoms could suddenly get worse or flare up. This is called an exacerbation. Many irritants or triggers can cause an exacerbation.

It is important to understand the triggers so you can avoid them. This can help you to keep your symptoms under control and have a better quality of life.

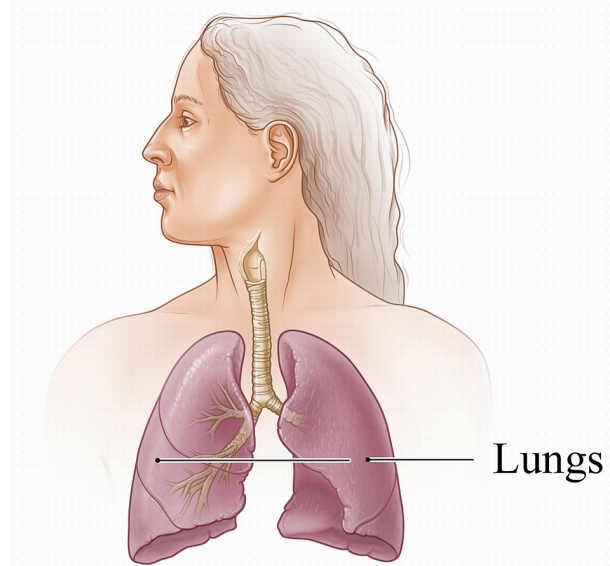
What are common COPD triggers?

Triggers include:

- Illnesses like colds, flu, or pneumonia.
- Tobacco smoke or air pollution.
- Fumes from cleaning supplies or other chemicals.
- Wood or kerosene home heaters.
- Things you are allergic to, such as pollen, mold, dust mites, or pet hair.

How can you avoid triggers?

- Take steps to prevent colds and other infections. When people with COPD get the flu, it may turn into something more serious, like pneumonia.
 - Get a flu shot each year, as soon as it's available.
 - Ask those you live or work with to do the same so they don't get the flu and infect you.



- Ask your doctor about the pneumococcal and whooping cough (pertussis) vaccines.
- If you must be around people with colds or flu, wash your hands often.
- Do not smoke or allow others to smoke around you. Quitting smoking is the most important step you can take to prevent more damage to your lungs. It is never too late to stop smoking. Stop-smoking programs and medicines boost your chances of quitting for good.
- Avoid outdoor lung irritants such as air pollution.
 - Try to stay inside with your windows closed when air pollution is bad.

- Use air-conditioning in hot weather so you do not have to open windows.
- Try to keep indoor air clean.
 - Use an air conditioner or air purifier with a special air (HEPA) filter.
 - Avoid strong chemicals and aerosol sprays. Consider using natural cleaners, such as vinegar, lemon juice, boric acid, or baking soda.
 - Make sure fireplaces and wood stoves have tight-fitting doors. Check flues and chimneys for cracks that could allow fumes into your house.
 - Make sure wood stoves and gas ranges are vented well. And turn on your kitchen fan when you cook.

When to call your doctor

Call 911 anytime you think you may need

emergency care. For example, call if:

- You have severe trouble breathing.
- You have severe chest pain.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have new or worse shortness of breath.
- You develop new chest pain.
- You are coughing more deeply or more often, especially if you notice more mucus or a change in the color of your mucus.
- You cough up blood.
- You have new or increased swelling in your legs or belly.
- You have a fever.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You need to use your antibiotic or steroid pills.
- Your symptoms are getting worse.



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