



# Managing flare-ups

## What is a flare-up?

Keeping track of your symptoms will help you to recognise what is normal for you, and what isn't. It's normal for many people to experience a slight worsening of symptoms on a day-to-day basis, for example when you first wake in the morning or in response to a trigger. This usually improves quickly when you take your reliever medication and avoid your triggers.

A flare-up – sometimes known as an 'exacerbation' – is sustained worsening of your symptoms from their usual state, beyond this normal change. You may experience a flare-up for no apparent reason. Common symptoms of a flare-up are:

- breathlessness becoming worse
- persistent cough, including coughing up more phlegm or sputum
- a change in the colour and consistency of phlegm

You should have an action plan that you have agreed with your GP or health care professional, which sets out what to do if you have a flare-up. It may include a medication rescue pack of antibiotics and steroids for you to keep at home.

You can find out more about managing flare-ups and download more copies of this plan at [www.blf.org.uk/COPD](http://www.blf.org.uk/COPD)

## Flare-ups: your pull-out action plan

### Part 1

 **To be discussed and agreed with your health care professional**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

GP: \_\_\_\_\_

GP phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Other doctor/nurse: \_\_\_\_\_

Next of kin: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

My symptoms	Plan of action
<p><b>My symptoms are normal for me</b></p>	<p>I will continue to take my usual medication as prescribed.</p>
<p><b>Mild flare-up</b></p> <p>I am more breathless than normal but I have no fever, and there is no change in the colour and volume of my phlegm.</p>	<p>I will use my reliever medication.</p> <p><b>This is:</b></p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
<p><b>Moderate flare-up</b></p> <p>I am more breathless than normal and coughing up more phlegm, or my phlegm has changed in colour.</p> <p>I am much more breathless despite taking my reliever medication.</p>	<p>I will continue to use my medication as prescribed and I will also use my rescue pack.</p> <p><b>Steroid:</b></p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Antibiotic:</b></p> <p>.....</p> <p>I will tell my GP or health care professional within two days of starting this treatment.</p>
<p><b>Severe flare-up</b></p> <p>My breathing is much worse than normal, despite treatment.</p> <p>I have chest pain or high fevers.</p>	<p>I will call my GP the same day, as soon as my symptoms become this bad. If I can't call myself, I will ask someone to call for me.</p> <p><b>If I cannot wait to see my doctor, I will call 999 straight away. If I am too breathless, I will ask someone to call for me.</b></p>

**Do I feel worse than usual? Symptoms may include:**



Increased breathlessness



Increased phlegm, change in colour: green/brown/yellow



Increased chesty cough

**What can I do?**



Continue or increase your inhaler or nebuliser treatment



Start antibiotics and steroids (your rescue pack)



Keep calm and do your breathing and relaxation exercises

**I must remember...**



Contact your practice nurse or GP or the community respiratory team



**If symptoms are severe, call 999 in an emergency**

**Remember:**

If you need to use your rescue pack medication, you will need to order some more from your GP or health care professional to keep it topped up.

## Top tips for managing a flare-up

- Eat little and often, rather than having big meals.
- Use controlled breathing techniques.
- If you are producing more phlegm than normal, try using chest-clearing techniques to get rid of it.
- Try some techniques to help you to relax and relieve anxiety.
- Drink plenty of fluid – little and often is best.

### Remember:

- If you cough up blood, either during a flare-up or when you are feeling well, contact your GP as soon as you can.
- Let your GP or health care professional know when you begin taking medication for a flare-up, so that you can order another rescue pack of steroids and antibiotics.
- If you are experiencing two or more flare-ups a year that require steroids or antibiotics, talk to your GP or health care professional to make an appointment for a review.

**Part 1** of your action plan, which you should agree with your health care professional in advance, should detail how soon to start additional medication, dosage and how long you should take it. It may be useful to keep track of how often you have flare-ups, and what action you take, so that you and your health care professional can recognise if your condition is getting worse.

## Part 2

Use this section to record the details of a flare-up. This can be useful to look back on with your health care professional, to assess how effective your action plan is and whether you need to make any changes.

I noticed my symptoms changed on:

.....  
*(Day and date if known)*

I started my rescue pack medication on:

.....  
*(Day and date if known)*

Antibiotics I took:

.....  
*(Dose, how often)*

Steroids I took:

.....  
*(Dose, how often)*

Extra reliever inhaler I took:

.....  
*(Dose, how often, when I started taking it)*

I called my GP or health care professional on:

Advice I was given:

.....  
.....  
.....

