

APPENDIX 5. Patient Handout for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

WHAT IS COPD?

COPD is a lung disease that makes it hard for you to breathe. Lungs can be irritated and damaged by cigarette smoke, air pollution, chemical fumes, wood smoke and frequent childhood lung infections. In some people, this damage causes COPD. The most common COPD symptoms are a cough that lasts a long time, phlegm (mucous) when you cough and/or shortness of breath, especially during exercise or other physical activity. Feeling short of breath is not something that happens just because you are getting older.

WHAT CAN I DO TO BREATHE BETTER?

Stop smoking

Quitting smoking is the best way to prevent further damage to your lungs. Talk with your family doctor about options to help you quit. Contact the Lung Association helpline at 1-866-717-COPD (2673) or www.lung.ca/COPD for information on quitting and referrals to local quit programs.



Relieve symptoms

- **Take your medications:** Medications can help control your symptoms, and they are taken by inhaler to get directly into your lungs. You may be prescribed more than one medication. Knowing how each one should be taken is essential. The main types of medication for COPD are:
 - ✓ Bronchodilators — they help relieve shortness of breath by opening up the airways in your lungs. These can provide quick relief and are used if you need help right away.
 - ✓ Combination bronchodilator and inhaled steroid — they help relieve shortness of breath and reduce swelling in the airways. Combination medications help over time but do not provide relief right away.



Even if you think the medication is not helping at first, it's important to keep taking it.

- **Learn how to use your inhaler properly:** If your medication is not getting into your lungs, it will not be effective! Ask your doctor or your pharmacist to show you how to use the inhaler properly. It is helpful to check your technique at each visit. You can view videos on how to use different types of inhalers on the Lung Association's website (see the Medication link at www.lung.ca/copd).
- **Avoid triggers:** Avoid things that may irritate your lungs, like dust, fumes and cigarette smoke. Stay indoors when outside air quality is poor.

Improve your health and get active:

Exercise is one of the best things you can do! It may help you feel better and give you more energy. Although it may be difficult to think about exercising when you're feeling tired and having trouble breathing, regular exercise can help. Talk to an expert at The Lung Association helpline (1-866-717-COPD [2673]) about how to exercise. You can download a booklet on exercise from the Resources section at www.lung.ca/copd.



HOW DO I PREVENT FLARE-UPS?

Flare-ups are when you have more shortness of breath, more coughing and more phlegm — which often turns green or yellow or thickens. Preventing flare-ups or treating them as early as possible is important, as flare-ups can damage your lungs and are the main reason people with COPD go to hospital.

- Take care of your health, use your medications as directed, and get a flu shot and a pneumonia shot.
- Talk with your doctor about creating an action plan to help you act early when you have symptoms. Bring your action plan to each visit. A blank action plan is available at <http://www.copdactionplan.com/> (click on COPD Action Plan 2013).

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

The Breathworks Plan, a booklet by the Canadian Lung Association, was the source for much of the information in this summary. You can find this booklet at www.lung.ca/COPD along with other helpful information on medications (including how to use inhalers), flare-ups, triggers, exercise, managing energy and tiredness, and how to catch your breath if you feel breathless.

