

Achieve

▶ YOUR HEALTHIEST LIFE WITH COPD

A New Future With COPD Starts Here



Welcome to the AvMed Disease Management Program's new newsletter, *Achieve*. We've designed it specifically for our Members who are living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and our goal is simple: to bring you expert-approved strategies that help you not only manage your condition, but also help you achieve your optimal health.

Each quarterly issue will deliver condition-specific articles with plenty of support for the rest of your life, from eating well, to moving more, to reducing stress.

And no matter where you are in your COPD journey, AvMed's Disease Management team —

staffed with registered nurses, care advocates and a dietitian — can guide you every step of the way. Whether you need help making doctor's appointments, managing your medications or finding local resources, your care team is just a phone call or email away.

To speak with a Case Manager, please call **1-833-609-0735** or email us at **DM@avmed.org**. We are honored to be your partner in health care.

Sincerely,

Robert Bonnell, M.D.
AvMed Medical Director

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Your COPD Medication Cheat Sheet

Get the facts on how your medications work and learn how to stay on track with your treatment.

If you've been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), you know how uncomfortable the condition can be. Fortunately, there are medications that can help ease symptoms like coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. The trick: taking your medication as instructed by your doctor. Here's what you need to know to breathe easier:

Bronchodilators

These medications relax the muscles around your airways, opening them up so you can breathe with less effort. Most bronchodilators are taken using an inhaler, so the medicine is delivered straight to your lungs. Some also come in pill form. There are two types:

Short-acting bronchodilators:

Also called rescue inhalers, you use these drugs when symptoms first appear. They work for about 4 to 6 hours, and some can ease symptoms within 3 to 5 minutes.

Long-acting bronchodilators:

These medications are generally taken once or twice every day to help stop breathing problems before they start. They work for about 12 to 24 hours.

Corticosteroids

If you have daily flare-ups, your doctor may prescribe an inhaled corticosteroid. This type of med-



ication helps lower inflammation in the airways and improve lung function. They're often used daily to reduce exacerbations.

If your symptoms don't improve with treatment or get worse, call your health care provider. If you can't catch your breath or have a rapid heartbeat, chest pains, confusion or severely blue lips or fingernails, seek immediate care.

Get more from your medicine

Sticking to your treatment plan can help you avoid a trip to the hospital. Try these tips:

Pair your medicine with another habit. Plan to take your medicine at set times each day, such as

while you're brewing the coffee or right after brushing your teeth.

Give yourself reminders. Visual or audio cues can be very helpful. Put a sticky note on the mirror or set alarms on your phone.

Ask about automating your refills. Many pharmacies have text alert programs or automatic refills so you always have your medicine on hand. You might also be able to set up home delivery if getting to a drugstore is hard.

Check in with how you feel. Are side effects from your medicine getting in the way of daily life? Talk to your doctor or health care provider. They might be able to change your prescription or dose to help you feel more comfortable.

We're Here for You
Your Case Manager can connect you to the resources you need.
Just call 1-833-609-0735.

Healthy Habits That Boost Your Lung Function

Medications are key to managing your COPD. But the right lifestyle habits can also lower your risk of flare-ups and just help you feel better. Try these to start:

If you smoke, make a plan to quit. Long-term cigarette smoking is the biggest risk factor for COPD. E-cigarettes and vaping devices can also harm your lungs and make COPD worse.

Practice pursed-lip breathing. This simple breathing exercise helps slow down your breathing and improve breathing patterns. Start by breathing in slowly through your nose for two counts, keeping your mouth closed. Then pucker your lips as if you're about to whistle and breathe out slowly for four counts.



Exercise regularly. Staying active can improve how well your lungs work. Exercise can be beneficial for those with COPD. Before starting an exercise program, check with your health care provider. In general, aim to gradually work up to 20 to 30 minutes at least 3 to 4 times a week to achieve maximum benefits. But even a 20-minute walk once a day could make a difference.

Is It Time to Step Up Your COPD Treatment?

Some COPD symptoms are impossible to miss. But there are other less obvious signs that your disease could be progressing. Here are two to watch for.

When you have COPD, you know to call the doctor if your cough worsens or you're more short of breath than usual. But there are two other easier-to-ignore symptoms that also warrant an appointment, says Roman Culjat, M.D., a pulmonary and critical care specialist at the Lung Center at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore.

Depression Emotional health issues and COPD often go hand in hand. About 25% of patients with COPD are prescribed antidepressants, according to a 2021 study in *Therapeutic Advances in Respiratory Disease*.

"When you're short of breath, you can't do the things you normally do, which can lead to depression," says Dr. Culjat.

And according to the study, depression may make COPD

treatments less effective because patients who are depressed tend to avoid physical activity.

If you feel down most days or find yourself avoiding activities you used to enjoy, call your provider.

Weight loss Sudden weight loss is another reason to check in. And it's common among patients with COPD. That's because the work of breathing requires more calories in people with COPD, according to the COPD Foundation. In fact, patients need 430 to 720 extra calories a day.

"Sometimes weight loss is not healthy," Dr. Culjat says. If you're losing weight without even trying, talk to your doctor. If you think you could benefit from a consultation with an AvMed dietitian, who can help you get the extra nutrition you need, call **1-833-609-0735** for info.



▶ **YOUR HEALTHIEST LIFE WITH COPD**

The Right Care at the Right Time

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AvMed services will be standing by.

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Licensed medical professionals come to you ready to treat urgent issues such as cuts and infections. Call 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily to determine if they are available in your area.

Urgent care center

AvMed.org

If you think you have bronchitis, an infection, an allergic reaction or need wound care, visit an urgent care center if your physician is unavailable. To find an in-network center, go to **AvMed.org**.

Emergency department

If you suspect a heart attack or stroke, or have uncontrollable bleeding or trouble breathing, don't wait: Call 911 or go to the ER.