

Your Action Plan for Exacerbations (Flare-ups)

You and your healthcare practitioner should develop a written action plan for [flare-ups](#) (*exacerbations*). This plan **may** include:

- Using more [medicines](#) to relax and open your airways (*bronchodilators*) and using them more frequently
- Adding an [inhaled corticosteroid \(ICS\)](#) to your care plan. Or, increasing the dose if you already take one.
- Adding a new bronchodilator.
- Using [antibiotics](#).
- Using [oral corticosteroids \(OCS\)](#) for 3-14 days to reduce inflammation.
- Eating properly and drinking plenty of fluids.

Action plan: Should you go to the hospital?

Most people can follow their action plans and deal with flare-ups at home. However, some people may need to go to the hospital when their symptoms get worse. These include people who

- Are severely ill
- Are on chronic oxygen therapy
- Have had respiratory failure in the past

To assess the severity of a flare-up, patients with Alpha-1 COPD flare-ups may need

- A chest examination
- An X-ray (to rule out pneumonia)
- [Arterial blood gas tests](#) to check oxygen and carbon dioxide levels

Action plan: When to call your healthcare practitioner

Call your health care provider within 24 hours if you:

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- Need to use your rescue inhaler or nebulizer more often, and using them doesn't help you breathe better.
- Have more mucus, and it's thicker, has a different color, and smells.
- Have swollen ankles, even after a night of sleeping with your feet up.
- Wake up feeling short of breath more than once a night.
- Feel tired for longer than just a day.
- Have a fever for more than a day.

Action plan: Symptoms that say go to the Emergency Department

If you have these symptoms, call 911 or go right to the emergency room:

- Disorientation, confusion, slurring of speech, or sleepiness during an acute respiratory infection
- Loss of alertness, or two or more of the following:
 - A sudden increase in shortness of breath even when you're at rest
 - Having to use your upper chest and neck muscles (*accessory muscles*) to breathe
 - Big increase or decrease in respiratory rate
 - Big increase in heart rate
- Any severe shortness of breath, chest pain, or other symptoms that makes you fear for your ability to survive.

What not to do when you have a flare-up

There are many things you can do at home to treat signs and symptoms. But don't

- Smoke.
- Take codeine or any other [cough medicine](#).

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- Wait more than 24 hours to contact your healthcare practitioner if symptoms continue.

Remember: Your symptoms won't go away if you ignore them. Watch your symptoms and follow your action plan to make sure flare-ups don't turn into something worse.

For more in-depth information on this topic, please visit the [Big Fat Reference Guide \(BFRG\)](#). If you are enrolled in AlphaNet's Subscriber Portal, you can access the BFRG [here](#).