REMEMBER

Always take each medicine exactly as your doctor says to take it. Discuss your medicines and how they make you feel. Make sure to visit your doctor at least two times a year for checkups.

Source:
National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

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Prevent complications and slow the progress of COPD

Smoking is the leading cause of COPD. The best way to control the progressive damage of COPD on your lungs is to quit smoking. Talk to your doctor about programs and products that can help you quit. Set a date to quit, keep cigarettes out of the house, and remove all ashtrays. Stay away from places or people that make you want to smoke. When the craving gets bad, chew gum, snack on fruits and vegetables, or drink some water.

Once you’ve been diagnosed with COPD, take each medicine the way the doctor says to take it. Keep the air clean at home and stay away from things that make it hard to breathe, such as smoke. Keep your body strong by eating and exercising regularly, and eating healthy foods.

Go to the doctor at least twice a year for checkups. Go to the hospital or see your doctor right away if your breathing gets bad.

Managing with medicines, treatments and surgery

Once you’ve been diagnosed there are different medicines and treatments that doctors prescribe to manage your COPD. You should have careful discussions about the benefits and risks of any treatments you are receiving or are considering. Talk to your doctor right away if you have any side effects from your treatment.

**Medicines**

**Bronchodilators**
Bronchodilators relax the muscles around your airways. This helps open your airways and makes breathing easier. Depending on how severe your disease is, your doctor may prescribe short-acting or long-acting bronchodilators. Short-acting bronchodilators last about 4 to 6 hours and are usually used only when needed. Long-acting bronchodilators last about 12 hours more and are used every day.

Most bronchodilators are taken using a device called an inhaler. This device allows the medicine to go right to your lungs. If your COPD is moderate or severe, your doctor may prescribe regular treatment with short- and long-acting bronchodilators.

**Inhaled glucocorticosteroids (steroids)**
Inhaled steroids are used for some people who have severe or very severe COPD. These medicines may reduce airway inflammation (swelling). Your doctor may ask you to try inhaled steroids for a trial period of 6 weeks to 3 months to see whether the medicine is helping with your breathing problems.

**Vaccines**

**Flu shots**
The flu (influenza) can cause serious problems for people who have COPD. Flu shots can reduce your risk for the flu. Talk with your doctor about getting a yearly flu shot.

**Pneumococcal vaccine**
This vaccine lowers your risk for pneumococcal pneumonia (nu-MON-ee-ah) and its complications. People who have COPD are at higher risk for pneumonia than people who don’t have COPD. Talk with your doctor about whether you should get this vaccine.

**Pulmonary rehabilitation**
Pulmonary rehab is a medically supervised program that helps improve the health and well-being of people who have lung problems. Rehab may include an exercise program, disease management training, and nutritional and psychological counseling. The program aims to help you stay more active and carry out your day-to-day activities.

**Oxygen therapy**
If you have severe COPD and low levels of oxygen in your blood, oxygen therapy can help you breathe better. You may need extra oxygen all the time or just sometimes. For some people who have severe COPD, using extra oxygen for most of the day can help them:

- Do tasks or activities, while having fewer symptoms
- Protect their hearts and other organs from damage
- Sleep more during the night and improve alertness during the day

**Surgery**
In rare cases, surgery may benefit some people who have COPD. Surgery usually is a last resort for people who have severe symptoms that have not improved from taking medicines. Talk to your doctor about the different types of surgery available.

The goals of COPD treatment

- Relieve your symptoms
- Slow the progress of the disease
- Improve your exercise tolerance (your ability to stay active)
- Prevent and treat complications
- Improve your overall health