



## COMPLICATIONS

COPD can cause or contribute to the development of several other serious health problems. Adequately treating and controlling COPD can decrease your risk of developing other health issues.

Complications of COPD include:

- **Heart disease.** Lack of oxygen in the body strains the heart and can lead to enlargement of the heart and heart failure. COPD also increases the risk of high blood pressure.
- **Respiratory infections.** COPD increases your risk of contracting colds and lung infections. And underlying COPD increases the risk of a simple cold developing into something much more serious, such as pneumonia.
- **Lung cancer.** COPD increases the risk of lung cancer in people who have smoked.
- **Depression.** It can be difficult to adjust to any changes in your health, especially ones that make it more difficult for you to do the things you love. It's common to feel depressed or down about a diagnosis of COPD. If your feelings of sadness last several weeks, though, or if you find you're avoiding people and activity, or no longer feeling joy in life, let your health-care provider know. You could be experiencing clinical depression.

**COPD exacerbations** (flares of disease), are the most common complication of COPD. A COPD exacerbation is when your COPD suddenly gets worse. Most people with COPD have a fairly regular baseline, a degree of shortness of breath, fatigue, and coughing that is normal for them. During a COPD exacerbation, someone who has COPD may be much more short of breath, coughing much more than usual, or producing more sputum (mucus) than usual.

COPD exacerbations can land you in the hospital, so it's important to take them seriously. Your health-care provider will work with you to develop a COPD action plan—a treatment plan you can use to head-off flares. Following your action plan can decrease the severity of your flare-up and keep you out of the hospital.

If your action plan doesn't seem to be working—if your symptoms are getting worse instead of better—call your health-care provider right away.

Call 911 (or have someone else call 911) if you are extremely short of breath, if you have chest pain, or if your fingertips or lips are turning blue.