

HELP US HELP YOU

*across Suffolk
and north east Essex*

NHS

**Suffolk and
North East Essex**



Taking care with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

When you have a long-term condition, it's important to take care of yourself and follow the advice of your GP practice and consultants so you can prevent your condition from worsening or getting complications. This guide will help you to know what you should be doing, and what to do if you start feeling worse. Our aim is to ensure that you get the care you need, when you need it. We want you to be able to look after yourself and know your warning signs, so that you don't end up in an emergency situation.

Symptoms of COPD



The main symptoms of COPD are:

- shortness of breath, particularly when you're active
- a persistent chesty cough with phlegm – some people may dismiss this as just a "smoker's cough"
- frequent chest infections
- persistent wheezing
- There may also be periods when they get suddenly worse, known as a flare-up or exacerbation



When to get medical advice



Speak to your GP practice if you have persistent symptoms of COPD, particularly if you're over 35 and smoke or used to smoke.

Please do not ignore the symptoms. If they're caused by COPD, it's best to start treatment and stop smoking before your lungs become significantly damaged.

The healthcare professional will ask about your symptoms and whether you smoke or have smoked in the past. They can organise a breathing test to help rule out other lung conditions, such as asthma.

Treatment



Treatment can help to slow the progression and control the symptoms of COPD. The most important thing you can do is stop smoking if you are a smoker. You may also be prescribed inhalers, medications and pulmonary rehabilitation. Follow your care team's advice, including taking any medication prescribed, to make sure your health is in the best possible condition.

Please consider the following:



- Receive the flu vaccination before winter
- Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations
- If you notice an increase in sputum, particularly if it is coloured or if you are getting increasingly short of breath, you should contact your GP practice or COPD nurse for advice
- If your symptoms are getting worse and you have been prescribed rescue medication, please consider using this as well as contacting a health professional.

Please make sure you have adequate supplies of medication and monitor weather forecasts at regular intervals. If there are instances of inclement weather, please arrange for a relative or a friend to collect your medication on your behalf.

Remember you can access healthcare services 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If there is an urgent need, you can obtain medical advice by visiting www.111.nhs.uk - or phoning NHS 111.

