

## PRACTICE LOGO & NAME

DATE

Dear PATIENT NAME,

I am enclosing the below article with very helpful information to help you understand COPD and how to manage it during the hot summer months.

Our goal is for us to work together with you to help you breathe comfortably and avoid unnecessary flare ups and hospitalizations. Please remember to call our office asap with any fever, increase cough or increasing shortness of breath.

Keep your follow-up appointments and do not allow your medications to run out.

Enjoy the rest of your summer!

PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER NAME

CARE MANAGER NAME

OFFICE CONTACT INFO

# Summer with COPD: How to Avoid Complications

## Beating the heat when you have COPD

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*Updated February 19, 2016*

For people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, summer heat is not only uncomfortable, it can lead to dangerous complications. Extreme heat and humidity can worsen COPD symptoms, including increased shortening of breath and bronchospasms.

Here's a closer look at the problems you can encounter with COPD in hot weather, and how to prevent serious summertime complications.

### **Worsening Dyspnea**

One of the primary complaints of patients with COPD is dyspnea, or shortness of breath.

When the temperature heats up, your level of dyspnea can sometimes be far greater than normal. Why is this?

Extreme temperatures often result in stress to the entire body. If we think about how our bodies react to stress, we may be able to better understand the phenomenon of how temperature affects breathing.

The body is always working to try to maintain a normal body temperature, which is about 98.6 degrees F. When we are exposed to extreme weather conditions, such as during the heat of summer, the body must expend extra energy to try to cool itself down in order to maintain a normal body temperature.

This extra energy requirement causes the body to demand more oxygen. If you have COPD, you are already using much of your energy just to breathe, not to mention everything else that you do during the day. So it's not

uncommon to experience a greater level of shortness of breath when you are exposed to extreme temperatures as your body is forced to use more energy while it struggles to maintain your body temperature. For people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, summer heat is not only uncomfortable, it can lead to dangerous complications. Extreme heat and humidity can, including increased shortening of breath and bronchospasms.

## **Bronchospasms**

Have you ever stepped outside on a really hot day and taken in a deep breath? The result is often startling. For people with COPD whose airways are already inflamed and irritated, breathing hot air can worsen this, leading to bronchospasm.

During a bronchospasm, the smooth muscle of the airways contract, which decreases the size of the airways.

This makes it more difficult to get air into or out of the lungs, which also will increase shortness of breath and make it harder to breathe.

## **Preventing Complications**

While we cannot control the weather, we can control our environment. Here are some steps you can take to beat the heat this summer and breathe easier:

### **Drink Plenty of Fluids:**

During the hot summer months, you should increase your fluid intake regardless of your activity level or thirst.

### **Wear Appropriate Clothing and Sunscreen:**

A sunburn makes it even more difficult for your body to cool itself, so be sure to wear sunscreen every day, even if you are not planning to be in the direct sunlight. Keep cool by wearing lightweight, light-colored, loose fitting garments.

**Plan Your Activities Carefully:**

If you have to go outside, do so in the early morning hours or after the sun goes down. When driving, park in shady areas and place sun protectors in your car. Choose air-conditioned venues and indoor activities.

**Stay Cool:**

If it is possible, stay indoors in an air-conditioned building. If you don't have air conditioning, plan your day to involve going to places that do, for example the library, a shopping mall or a friend or family member's home that is air conditioned. Take a cool shower or bath to lower your body temperature. Avoid activities that involve utilizing extra energy. Call your local health department to see if they can recommend a heat-relief shelter in your area.

**Use the Buddy System:**

During hot summer months, make sure to have friends or family members call at least twice a day to make sure you are OK.

**Avoid Excess Activity:**

You will be better able to tolerate the heat if you avoid strenuous physical activity or exercise during hot days.

**Take Your Medications as Directed:**

Remember to take your medications as directed by your doctor. If you use oxygen, talk to your doctor about your oxygen requirements during the summer months.

**Pay Attention to Weather Reports:**

Make it a point to watch or listen to the daily weather report alerting you to current weather conditions. Plan your activities during times of more moderate weather, devoid of extreme weather advisories. Even short periods of extreme temperatures can cause serious illness and/or COPD complications.

Source: [www.verywell.com/copd-the-heat-is-on-914679](http://www.verywell.com/copd-the-heat-is-on-914679)

# Symptom Response Plan – COPD



## Green Zone: Great Control

- Usual activity and exercise level
- Usual amounts of cough and phlegm/mucus
- Sleep well at night
- Appetite is good

- Continue taking your medications as prescribed
- Use oxygen as prescribed
- Follow healthy eating habits
- Exercise regularly
- At all times avoid cigarette smoke and inhaled irritants
- Keep all doctor appointments



## Yellow Zone: Caution

- More breathless than usual
- Less energy for daily activities
- Change in color, thickness, odor, or amount of phlegm/mucus
- Using "rescue" inhaler/nebulizer more often
- New or increased swelling of ankles - more than usual
- More coughing than usual
- Feeling like you have a "chest cold"
- Poor sleep and symptoms causing you to wake up
- Poor appetite
- Medicine does not seem to be helping

- Continue taking your medications as prescribed
- Use rescue inhaler ever \_\_\_\_\_ hours
- Start an oral corticosteroid (specify name, dose, and duration) \_\_\_\_\_
- Start an antibiotic (specify name, dose, and duration) \_\_\_\_\_
- Use oxygen as prescribed
- Get plenty of rest
- Use pursed lip breathing
- At all times avoid cigarette smoke and inhaled irritants
- Call your provider immediately if symptoms don't improve

**\*Work closely with your health care team if you are going into the YELLOW zone.**

Provider: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_



## Red Zone: Stop & Think

- Severe shortness of breath even at rest
- Not able to do any activity because of breathing
- Blue color in lips or fingers
- Fever or shaking chills
- Feeling confused, drowsy, and/or slurring of speech
- Chest pains
- Coughing up blood
- A large increase in heart rate and/or respirations

- You need to be evaluated by a physician right away.
- Go to the nearest emergency room department  
**OR**
- Call 911
- While getting help, immediately do the following:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**\*Call your physician if you are going into the RED zone.**

Provider: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

The health information being provided is for general education purposes only.  
Your health care provider is the single best source of information regarding your health.

*Adapted from the American Lung Association – My COPD Action Plan*