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## TAKING ACTION WITH YOUR COPD BEFORE WINTER

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is an umbrella term for a number of lung diseases that can make breathing difficult. This includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

For many people with COPD, winter can be a time for flare-ups. Your doctor might call this an exacerbation. Even though COPD is a long-term condition, there are things you can do to slow the disease and improve your day-to-day life.

Using the following tips, take action and be prepared this winter:

### **Tip 1: Make sure you have up-to-date flu and pneumonia vaccinations**

Having the flu is a serious illness and can be life threatening when you have COPD. Have a flu vaccine every autumn (around March or April) to reduce your chances of getting the flu and being seriously unwell. Having COPD also puts you at a high risk of getting pneumonia. Talk to your doctor to see whether your pneumonia vaccination is up-to-date.

### **Tip 2: Take steps to quit smoking**

If you have COPD, and you smoke, the single best thing you can do is to quit smoking. Stopping smoking slows down worsening of COPD symptoms. Talk to your doctor and pharmacist about the options for quitting. For support to quit and a personalised quitting plan contact the National Smoking Quitline on 13 7848 or at [www.quitnow.gov.au](http://www.quitnow.gov.au)

### Tip 3: Attend a pulmonary rehabilitation program

Research has shown that pulmonary rehabilitation is highly beneficial if you have COPD regardless of the stage of the disease. It will help you to breathe easier and help keep you out of hospital. Those who have attended a program have found they can resume many of the activities they had stopped because of their breathlessness.

#### What is it and how does it work?

The program combines exercise and education to help you to start to move more. The exercise program has safe, gentle and supported activities tailored to your current ability. You will gain the confidence to make exercise a part of your usual routine. Learning more about COPD can help you to find out about everyday ways to help control your symptoms. For example, you might learn more about how to reduce your breathlessness. Your confidence will grow and you will also get to meet other people with COPD.

#### Who is it for?

Whether you have just been diagnosed or you have more severe symptoms, pulmonary rehabilitation is recommended for every patient with COPD.

#### How do I access it?

Talk to your doctor about how to access a program or visit <https://lungfoundation.com.au/patients-carers/support-services/lung-disease-and-exercise/pulmonary-rehabilitation/>

#### *Pulmonary rehabilitation*

- increases your knowledge of COPD and your ability to manage it
- you will find it easier to do daily tasks and the things that you enjoy
- you will get to meet other people with COPD

#### *Quitting smoking*

- improves your lung health
- slows down the progression of COPD

#### *Up-to-date flu and pneumonia vaccinations*

- reduces your chance of a flare-up, serious illness or having a hospital visit

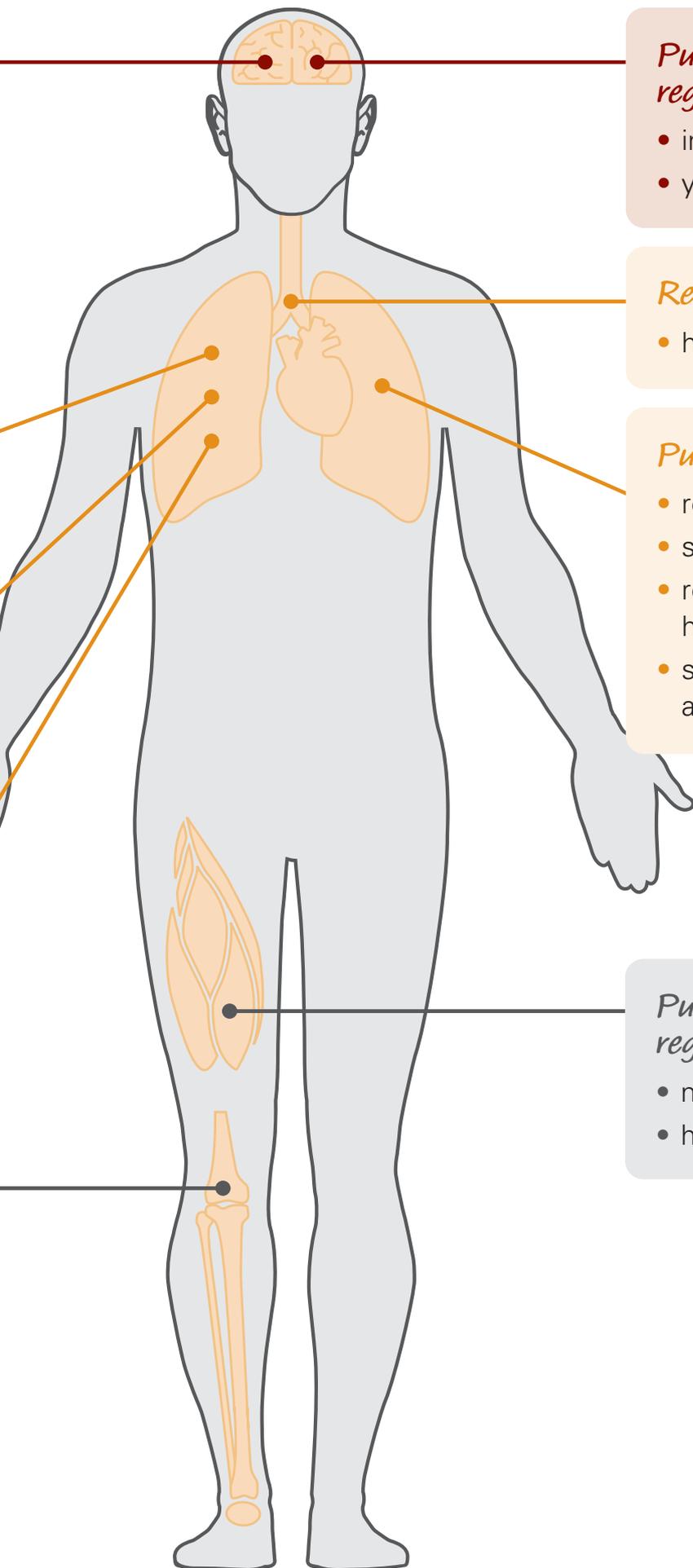
#### *Managing your inhaled COPD medicines well*

- helps to reduce your COPD symptoms, flare-ups and hospital visits
- reduces side effects

#### *Regular exercise*

- improves your bone strength
- reduces joint pain
- improves your balance

## How taking action can improve your COPD



### *Pulmonary rehabilitation and regular exercise*

- improves your mood and motivation
- you will sleep better and feel less tired

### *Regular exercise and being active*

- helps to keep your chest clear

### *Pulmonary rehabilitation*

- reduces your breathlessness
- slows down worsening of lung function
- reduces your chance of having to go to hospital for your COPD
- shortens recovery time after having a flare-up

### *Pulmonary rehabilitation and regular exercise*

- makes your body stronger
- helps you maintain a healthy weight

## Tip 4: Talk to your doctor about your COPD medicines

You might be taking a number of different medicines for your COPD. Most COPD medicines are breathed in using an inhaler device. Inhaled medicines work directly on the lungs and are very effective when used correctly.

There are many types of inhaler devices and they all have different instructions for use. Inhalers can be difficult to use. To make sure you are getting the most benefit from your inhaled medicines, ask a health professional to watch you while you use your inhaler. Even if you have been using your inhaler for a long time, ask a health professional to check your technique. If you are having difficulty using your device, ask your doctor whether there is a different device available. If you would like a reminder of how to use your device, instructional videos can be viewed from <https://lungfoundation.com.au/patients-carers/after-your-diagnosis-title/inhaler-devices/>

Before the winter months begin, talk to your doctor to find out:

- How your medicines work.
- When you should use your medicines and directions for use.
- How to best manage your inhaled medicines including how the device should be used, cleaned and stored.
- What steps to take in the case of a flare-up – your doctor can provide a written action plan just for you. Knowing what to do and being able to act early can help you to recover more quickly.

- Whether you might benefit from having a Home Medicines Review. A Home Medicines Review is a great way to learn more about your COPD medicines and the pharmacist can talk to you about how to best manage your inhaled medicines.

## Tip 5: Keep active

Regular exercise can help your breathing, reduce your symptoms, and improve your quality of life. It might mean that you are able to do physical activities that you were previously unable to do, such as walking around the garden or up a small flight of stairs.

If you avoid exercise because you fear becoming breathless, talk to your doctor about a pulmonary rehabilitation program. If you have already participated in a program, Lung Foundation Australia provides 'Lungs in Action' classes where you can access an ongoing exercise program in the community. [www.lungsinaction.com.au](http://www.lungsinaction.com.au)

## Tip 6: Join a support group

Join a support group to meet other people living with COPD, share your experiences, and learn new information. To find out where your nearest support group is located, call Lung Foundation Australia on 1800 654 301 or visit <https://lungfoundation.com.au/patients-carers/support-services/peer-support/>