

# RECOGNISING EXACERBATIONS IN CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE AIRWAY DISEASE



## WHAT IS AN EXACERBATION?

An exacerbation is also known as a "flare up", and it occurs when your lung condition gets worse. It can become serious and you may need to see a doctor or go to a hospital.

Typical signs and symptoms of a flare up could be one or more of the following:



Worsening breathlessness or wheeze



More or persistent cough



More or change in colour of sputum



Taking more reliever medication



Loss of appetite or sleep

## HOW DO YOU PREVENT A FLARE UP?

- Avoid triggers such as second-hand smoke, strong cleaning products or perfumes
- Get your scheduled vaccinations
- Eat healthy, stay active and have enough sleep
- Take your prescribed maintenance inhalers and medications regularly
- Maintain good hand hygiene
- Avoid people who have a cold and flu or wear a mask when you are in close contact with people when they are unwell
- Recognise your symptoms

## USING A "TRAFFIC LIGHT APPROACH" TO MONITOR YOUR SYMPTOMS

### Well

How you feel

- Usual activity level
- Usual amount of phlegm and cough
- Usual color of phlegm
- Good appetite

Action

#### Take the following actions:

- Take your prescribed inhalers and medications daily
- Avoid smoking
- Maintain your usual physical activities
- Ensure that your vaccines are up-to-date
- Attend your scheduled appointments

### Worse

- More breathless than usual
- More phlegm than usual
- Phlegm's colour is darker than usual
- More cough than usual
- Poor appetite
- Less energy for your daily activities

Take the following actions for next 7 to 14 days. If your symptoms improve, follow the actions in the **green zone** on the left.

1. If you are more breathless than usual: Start two puffs of Ventolin \*maximum six times a day
2. If you do not see any improvement in your symptoms within the next three days:

If you have a Rescue Pack:

- a) Activate Rescue Pack standby medication: Start prednisolone tablet and complete the medication as prescribed by your doctor
- b) If your phlegm becomes yellowish/ greenish:
  - Activate Rescue Pack standby medication within three days of a change in symptoms: start antibiotics and complete the medication as prescribed by your doctor

If you do not have a Rescue Pack: see a doctor to get a prescription for your medications

### Danger

- Extreme breathlessness (hard to breathe)
- Unable to sleep and do any activities due to breathlessness
- Coughing out blood
- Fever, confusion and drowsiness
- You are not getting better even after using the rescue pack (if prescribed)

Please see your doctor immediately and do not wait.

If your symptoms do not get better, you must go to the emergency department (ED).

Please call 995 for an ambulance if needed.

\*\*Take four puffs of Ventolin every 10 minutes until you get to the nearest ED.

Air Master by

