

# COPD hospital admission guidance

Being admitted to hospital with an exacerbation (when your symptoms suddenly get worse, also known as a flare-up) of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) can feel worrying or overwhelming, but you are not alone. This guide will help you to understand what could happen during your hospital stay.

Additional information is available from Asthma + Lung UK:  
[What is a COPD flare-up \(exacerbation\)?](#)

## Admission

When you are admitted to hospital, there are some aspects of care that you should receive:



Steroid tablets within 1 hour of arrival at hospital to reduce inflammation in your lungs.



Review from a specialist respiratory doctor, nurse or physiotherapist within 24 hours of arriving at hospital.



If you're finding it hard to breathe and tests show that you're not getting enough air in or out of your lungs, you may be offered a treatment called non-invasive ventilation (NIV). This involves wearing a mask that helps to move air in and out of your lungs to improve breathing quickly.

## Why is this initial assessment important?

Steroids can help to ensure that your COPD gets better as soon as possible when you are in hospital. When your doctors/nurses know how severe your COPD flare-up is, it helps them to understand how to care for you best.

### Questions you can ask your doctor/nurse/physiotherapist during your stay:

- > Have I been treated with steroids since I was admitted?
- > How severe is my COPD flare-up?
- > Have I had a review from a respiratory nurse/doctor?

## Discharge

During your stay and before you leave hospital, your healthcare team should:



check how you use your inhaler and review your medicines



give you a self-management plan or refer you to a community respiratory team for a plan to manage your COPD at home



provide stop-smoking support (if appropriate)



assess your suitability for pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) – a programme that can support the improvement of COPD symptoms



provide your emergency drug pack or refer you to a community respiratory team (if appropriate)

Once you're home, you should have:



a follow-up request within 72 hours of discharge by phone or in person.

## Who are NRAP?

The National Respiratory Audit Programme (NRAP) aims to improve the quality of care, services and clinical outcomes for people with respiratory conditions (including asthma and COPD). We do this by collecting data on hospital admissions and pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) courses, which are used both to inform and improve care and to produce reports with national recommendations.

Tel: +44 (0)20 3075 1526

Email: [nrapinbox@rcp.ac.uk](mailto:nrapinbox@rcp.ac.uk)

[www.rcp.ac.uk/nrap](http://www.rcp.ac.uk/nrap)

## Why is this discharge process important?

It's important for hospitals to make sure that they give you the appropriate medications, referrals and guidance when being discharged from hospital to help you to continue getting better and have the best chance of staying out of hospital in the future. Admission to hospital with a COPD flare-up is an important opportunity to make sure your COPD treatment plan is up to date and right for you – this can be done with the help of the specialist respiratory team.

### Questions you can ask your doctor/nurse during discharge:

- > Have I been given everything I need to be discharged?
- > Can you please check if I'm using my inhaler correctly?
- > Can we review my COPD self-management plan?
- > Will I speak to another doctor or nurse about this COPD flare-up after I've gone home?

### Tips from the NRAP adult patient panel

- > Bring your self-management action plan or any notes about your condition that you think are important for doctors/nurses to know.
- > To help with your breathing, look at the [Asthma + Lung UK guidance on breathlessness](#).
- > Use the [Asthma + Lung UK COPD patient passport](#) to make sure you're getting the right care when you're out of hospital.