

Talking with your doctor and nurse (COPD)

FACT SHEET prepared by The Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ

Good communication with your doctor and nurse is an essential part of your health care, and will help ensure that you are able to manage your condition as well as possible.

Before your appointment:

Make a list of questions or issues you want to discuss. Put them in order of importance to you:

- Include anything you need to update your doctor about - for example, how things are going with your medications, how often you need to take reliever medication, any changes in your symptoms, changes in your weight or sleep, any changes in the amount of physical activity you can do without getting short of breath and whether you are using any complementary or alternative therapies (CAM) such as herbal remedies or homeopathy.
- If you think you will need longer than a normal visit, make this clear when you make the appointment.
- Bear in mind that the more specific you can be, the better. For example, it will help if you can say precisely what your symptoms are, when you experience them, and how they affect your daily activities. Keeping a written record, such as a symptom diary between appointments may help with this.
- Decide whether you want to take a support person with you, and/or someone to help translate if English is not your first language.

During the appointment:

- Be honest. It may be tempting to say what you think they want to hear, but it's in your best interests to tell it how it really is. Tell them what medication or CAM you are actually taking, and let them know any concerns you may have about side effects
- Ask questions if there is anything you don't understand
- Get information and any instructions in writing where possible. Your doctor or practice nurse will either be able to give you some background material to take away, or tell you where you can access it. Information on COPD is also available from your local asthma society, or see the Foundation's website – www.asthmaandrespiratory.org.nz
- Check whether it might be useful to talk with one of the other members of the health team – there may be a nurse, physiotherapist, pharmacist or educator at your medical centre who could give you more detailed information and practical advice. Your local asthma society may also be able to help
- Make sure you know what happens next – for example, when you need to come back for another check-up.

Things you may want to ask about COPD:

- What is COPD? How is it different from asthma?
- Who gets it?
- How might COPD affect me, now and in the future?
- What might make it worse?
- Do I need a spirometry test, or any other tests – if so, what will they involve?
- What is a spirometry test?

What is the recommended treatment for COPD?:

- What role do medications play, and how do they work?
- Is exercise good or bad for COPD?
- Would physiotherapy and breathing control exercises benefit me?
- Is there anything special I should do, or anything I should avoid (e.g. types of food, alcohol, or other medications), while on this treatment?
- Is there a local COPD rehabilitation programme or support group I can attend?
- What are my alternatives?
- Can I have a written COPD management plan with instructions on what to do if my condition changes?
- What else can I do to make sure I stay as well as possible?
- Your inhaler technique (how you hold and use the inhaler) should be checked whenever you see your doctor. This will ensure that you're getting the most benefit from the medicine you are taking.
- If you have an aerosol inhaler, ask about using it with a spacer device
- If you have a Turbuhaler device, ask if you have enough breath to use it when you are unwell

The Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ can help you

The Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ is New Zealand's not-for-profit sector authority on asthma and other respiratory illnesses. We advocate to government and raise awareness of respiratory illnesses, fund research for better treatments and educate on best practice.

Check out our comprehensive website at asthmaandrespiratory.org.nz