

What are the medicines used to treat COPD?

There are several types of medications your doctor might prescribe, such as bronchodilators, inhaled steroids, and anti-inflammatory agents.

Bronchodilators

Bronchodilators relax the muscles around your airways. This helps open your airways and makes breathing easier.

Depending on the severity of your COPD, your doctor may prescribe short-acting or long-acting bronchodilators.

- **Short-acting bronchodilators** last about 4-6 hours and should be used only when needed. These are called **rescue medications**.
- **Long-acting bronchodilators** last about 12 hours or more and are used every day. These are called **controller medications**.

Most bronchodilators are taken using a device called an inhaler. This device allows the medicine to go straight to your lungs. Not all inhalers are used the same way. To access an instruction sheet on using the inhaler your doctor prescribed for you Visit <http://careguides.med.umich.edu/copd>.

If your COPD is mild, your doctor may only prescribe a short-acting inhaled bronchodilator. In this case, you may use the medicine only when symptoms occur.

If your COPD is moderate or severe, your doctor may prescribe regular treatment with short- and long-acting bronchodilators.

Combination Bronchodilators Plus Inhaled Glucocorticosteroids (Steroids)

In general, using inhaled steroids alone is not a preferred treatment. If your COPD is more severe, or if your symptoms flare up often, your doctor may prescribe a combination of medicines that includes a bronchodilator and an inhaled steroid. Steroids help reduce airway inflammation.

Your doctor may ask you to try inhaled steroids with the bronchodilator for a trial period of 6 weeks to 3 months to see whether the addition of the steroid helps relieve your breathing problems.

taking your medicines can greatly improve your condition and ability to participate in your favorite activities.

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Patient education handout associated with Michigan Medicine Clinical Care Guidelines.
Adapted from: NHLBI. COPD. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/copd>

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