



Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

Guide to Good Health

Healthy Living Guide

- ▶ Asthma
- ▶ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)
- ▶ Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
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What is Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)?

COPD refers to chronic bronchitis and emphysema, a pair of two commonly co-existing diseases of the lungs in which the airways become narrowed. It is a progressive disease that makes it hard to breathe. "Progressive" means that it gets worse over time.

Overview & Facts

- **COPD is a major cause of disability and it's the fourth leading cause of death in the United States.** More than 12 million people are currently diagnosed with COPD. Another 12 million likely have the disease and don't know it.
- **COPD develops slowly.** Symptoms often worsen over time and can limit your ability to do routine activities. Severe COPD may prevent you from doing even basic activities like walking, cooking, or taking care of yourself.
- **Most of the time, COPD is diagnosed in middle-aged or older people.** The disease isn't passed from person to person - you can't catch it from someone else.
- **COPD has no cure yet and doctors don't know how to reverse the damage to the airways and lungs.** However, treatments and lifestyle changes can help you feel better, stay more active, and slow the progress of the disease.



Signs & Symptoms

- ✓ Coughing that produces large amounts of mucus
- ✓ Wheezing
- ✓ Shortness of breath
- ✓ Chest tightness
- ✓ In severe COPD you may have other symptoms, such as weight loss, and lower muscle endurance.
- ✓ Some severe symptoms may require treatment in a hospital. You - with the help of family members or friends, if you are unable - should **seek emergency care** if:
 - You're having a hard time catching your breath or talking
 - Your lips or fingernails turn blue or gray (this is a sign of a low oxygen level in the blood)
 - You're not mentally alert
 - Your heartbeat is very fast
 - The recommended treatment for symptoms that are getting worse isn't working



Causes

- Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of COPD. Most people who have COPD smoke or used to smoke.
- Long-term exposure to smoke or other lung irritants such as:
 - ▶ Air pollution
 - ▶ Chemical fumes
 - ▶ Dust
- Pipe, cigar or other types of tobacco smoke, especially if smoke is inhaled.
- Second-hand smoke

Risk Factors

- People who have a family history of COPD are more likely to get the disease if they smoke.
- If you smoke and have a morning cough, you are at higher risk for COPD.



Questions to Ask Your Provider

1. Talk to your doctor about programs and products that can help you quit smoking.
2. The flu (influenza) can cause serious problems for people with COPD. Talk to your doctor about getting a yearly flu shot.
3. People who have COPD are at higher risk of pneumonia and its complications. Talk with your doctor about whether you should get a pneumococcal vaccine to lower your risk of getting pneumococcal pneumonia.
4. If surgery is recommended, discuss with your doctor the benefits and risks.
5. Ask your doctor about other diseases for which COPD may increase your risk, such as heart disease, pneumonia and lung cancer.

Diagnostic Workup

Everyone at risk for COPD who has a cough, sputum production or shortness of breath, should be tested for the disease. The test for COPD is called spirometry. This test:

- Is simple and non-invasive
- Tells your doctor if you have COPD and if so, how severe it is
- Measures the amount of air a person can blow out of the lungs and how fast he or she can blow it out
- Can help your doctor determine the best course of treatment



Treatment and Care

1. Medical

- Oxygen therapy
- Surgery
- Vaccines. People who have COPD are at higher risk of pneumonia and its complications. Talk with your doctor about whether you should get a pneumococcal vaccine to lower your risk of getting pneumococcal pneumonia.
- Managing complications

2. Pharmacological

- Bronchodilators relax the muscles around your airways to make breathing easier.
- Inhaled steroids are used for some people who have moderate or severe COPD. These may reduce airway inflammation (swelling).

3. Emotional/Psychological - Psychological counseling may be beneficial.

4. Physical

- Pulmonary rehab exercise program
- Try to avoid second-hand smoke
- Quitting smoking is the most important step you can take to treat COPD. Talk to your doctor about programs and products that can help you quit. Many hospitals have programs that help people quit smoking, or hospital staff can refer you to a program.



5. Nutritional

- Counseling to reduce carbohydrates in the diet.

Healthy Lifestyle Management

COPD has no cure yet. However, you can take steps to manage your symptoms and slow the progression of the disease. You can:

- ▶ **Avoid lung irritants.** If you smoke, quit. Avoid second-hand irritants, such as, air pollution, chemical fumes, and dust. Keep these irritants out of your home. If your home is painted or sprayed for insects, have it done when you can stay away for awhile. Stay at home (if possible) with the windows shut when there is a lot of air pollution or dust outside.
- ▶ **Get ongoing care.** Take all of your medicines as your doctor prescribes. Make sure to refill your prescriptions before they run out. Bring all of the medicines you are taking when you have medical checkups. Your doctor may want you to visit a pulmonologist (a doctor who specializes in lung disorders).
- ▶ **Manage COPD and its symptoms.** Depending on how severe your disease is, you may ask your family and friends for help with daily tasks. Do activities slowly. Put items that you use often in a place that is easy to reach. Find simple ways to cook, clean, and do other chores. Keep your clothes loose, and wear clothes and shoes that are easy to put on and take off.
- ▶ **Prepare for emergencies.** You should seek emergency care if you have severe symptoms such as trouble catching your breath or talking. Call your doctor if you notice your symptoms are worsening or if you have a fever. Keep phone numbers handy for your doctor, hospital, and someone who can take you for medical care. You should also have on hand directions to the doctor's office and hospital, and a list of all the medications you are taking.
- ▶ **Know when to call the doctor.** COPD symptoms usually worsen slowly over time. However, they can become more severe suddenly. For instance, a cold, the flu, or a lung infection may cause your symptoms to quickly worsen. **Call your doctor right away if you have:**
 - a much harder time catching your breath
 - chest tightness
 - more coughing than usual
 - changes in the color or amount of your sputum (spit)



Resources

- ❖ National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health
- ❖ Office of the Surgeon General: www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco
- ❖ National Cancer Institute: www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/tobacco