

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

What Is It?

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a group of long-term lung diseases that makes it hard to breathe. In COPD, airflow to the lungs is partially blocked. As the COPD gets worse, it gets harder to breathe. It may be hard to do daily tasks when you have COPD. COPD cannot be cured. But it can be managed. COPD is often a mix of two diseases:

- Chronic bronchitis
- Emphysema

In chronic bronchitis:

- Swelling occurs in the bronchial tubes.
- The swelling may narrow these tubes.
- This makes it hard to breathe.
- You also may have a chronic cough that brings up mucus.

In emphysema:

- Lung tissue and the tiny air sacs at the end of the airways in the lungs are damaged.
- When this happens, air gets trapped in the lungs.
- This leads to shortness of breath.

Causes of COPD

Smoking is the top cause of COPD. Nearly everyone with COPD (80 to 90 percent) has been a smoker for a long time. Even though you can have either chronic bronchitis or emphysema, people often have a mix of both. Smoking causes both of these diseases.



Other likely causes of COPD are:

- Long-term exposure to lung irritants. This includes industrial dust and chemical fumes.
- Low birth weight and having a lot of lung infections.
- Genetic factors also add to COPD. People with COPD who smoke often get the symptoms (signs) of emphysema in their 30s or 40s. Those who have COPD but do not smoke often develop signs in their 80s.

Symptoms of COPD

People with COPD often have signs of chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Your signs will change over time. Key signs are:

- Long-term cough
- Chronic mucus when you cough
- Getting acute bronchitis often
- Shortness of breath that is constant and gets worse. It may occur during exercise. It may get worse when you have a cold.

At times your symptoms (cough or shortness of breath) might get worse and last for a long time. This may happen if your COPD is mainly chronic bronchitis. Many doctors group COPD by symptoms and lung function. Lung function is based on tests that measure how much air you can breathe out. This is compared with a person who does not have COPD.

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KEYSTONE MERCY

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 KeystoneFIRST

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Preventing COPD

The best way to keep COPD from getting worse is to not smoke. Other airway irritants can make COPD worse. These include:

- Air pollution
- Chemical fumes
- Dust

These irritants are far less important than smoking in causing COPD. If you need help with your smoking problem, let us help. Please call **800-521-6860**.

Treating COPD

COPD cannot be cured. But it can be managed. Treating COPD focuses on:

- Slowing the disease. You can do this by avoiding tobacco smoke and air pollution.
- Keeping symptoms (such as shortness of breath) under control
- Staying active
- Taking care of your overall health

In serious cases of COPD, some treatments are:

- Pulmonary rehabilitation. This uses a team of health professionals that watches and treats the medical, physical and emotional parts of COPD. It joins exercise, breathing therapy, emotional support, nutritional guidance and education. This is required for those who need lung volume reduction surgery or a lung transplant.

- Oxygen treatment. This increases the amount of oxygen in the blood and lungs. It may improve shortness of breath. It also may help people with severe COPD to live longer.
- Ventilation devices. These aid in breathing. They are used most often in the hospital during a sudden and severe increase in shortness of breath.

If you follow your treatment plan, you may reduce your symptoms. This may help you to take part in:

- Hobbies
- Daily tasks
- Family events

People are diagnosed at various stages of COPD. Your first treatment will depend on how severe your COPD and symptoms are.

This is to help you learn about your medical condition. It is not to take the place of your doctor. If you have questions, talk with your doctor. If you think you need to see your doctor because of something you have read in this information, please contact your doctor. Never stop or wait to get medical attention because of something you have read in this material.

