

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COPD

In the Clinic
Annals of Internal Medicine

What Is Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)?

It is a common, preventable lung disease. People with COPD have a hard time getting air in and out of their lungs.

What Causes It?

Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of COPD. Breathing polluted air or chemical fumes over a long period of time may also cause it. In a small number of cases, it is caused by a rare genetic condition. It is usually diagnosed in middle-aged or older people.

What Are Common Symptoms?

- Shortness of breath, especially with activity
- Coughing a lot
- A cough that produces large amounts of mucus
- Wheezing
- Chest tightness
- Lack of energy or feeling tired

Your symptoms will depend on how severe your COPD is and how much damage has been done to your lungs. Some people have mild lung disease and only a few symptoms. Others have very severe lung disease and severe, frequent symptoms.

How Is It Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will listen to your chest with a stethoscope. He or she will ask about your symptoms and medical history.
- You will have a test called "spirometry." With this test, you blow into a machine called a spirometer that measures how well your lungs are working.
- Other tests and studies may be needed. These could include a CT scan of your chest, a blood test to measure the level of oxygen in your blood, or a walking test to measure how your body responds to activity.

How Is It Treated?

- One of the most important parts of COPD treatment is quitting smoking. This will improve your breathing, keep your COPD from getting worse, and lower your chances of dying. Your doctor will work with you to help you quit.
- Most symptoms are managed with inhaled medications, which improve breathing by relaxing airways or decreasing airway inflammation. Some inhalers are used every



- day; others are used only when your breathing gets worse. Talk to your doctor about the best inhalers for you based on cost, ease of use, and your personal preference.
- Your doctor may also prescribe steroids for short periods of time to help manage days when your symptoms are worse.
 - If you have moderate or severe COPD, your doctor may prescribe oxygen. In rare cases, surgery or a lung transplant may be recommended.
 - Your doctor may enroll you in a pulmonary rehabilitation program. This will teach you skills to live with COPD, manage symptoms, and improve your exercise tolerance.
 - Managing other diseases, staying up-to-date on your vaccines, getting regular activity, and eating well are also important to keeping you healthy.
 - You will need regular follow-up visits with your doctor. During these visits, your doctor will make sure you are using your inhaler correctly. They will review your symptoms and decide whether to make any changes to your medicine.

Questions for My Doctor

- What changes can I make in my life to help improve my symptoms?
- What will happen if I don't quit smoking? Can you help me quit?
- Is my lung damage reversible?
- Which inhaler is best for me?
- What are the risks or side effects of treatment?
- Would you watch me use my inhaler and tell me if I am using it correctly?
- Do I need oxygen therapy?
- Can I keep doing the things I like to do?
- How often should I have follow-up visits?
- Will I need to see any other doctors?

For More Information



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American Lung Association

www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd

MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/copd.html>

Live Well With COPD

<http://acp-resources.com/COPD/index.php>