

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)



What Is COPD?

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, is a lung disease. People with COPD have a hard time getting air in and out of their lungs. COPD may also be called chronic bronchitis or emphysema. Smoking can cause COPD. Some people may also get it from being around other people who smoke or from breathing dirty air.



What Are the Warning Signs of COPD?

- Coughing up large amounts of mucus
- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness
- Lack of energy
- Repeated respiratory infections



How Is COPD Diagnosed?

Your doctor will listen to your chest with a stethoscope. He or she will ask about your symptoms and medical history. Your doctor may order 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 may include a chest x-ray or CT scan. These tests can show signs of COPD. You may also get a blood test that measures oxygen levels in your blood.



How Is COPD Treated?

- Inhalers are used to give most medicines for COPD. Some medicines are used every day. Others are used only when your breathing gets worse.
- Your doctor may also prescribe steroids to reduce swelling in the airways of your lungs and help manage days when your symptoms are worse. For patients with moderate or severe COPD, your doctor may prescribe oxygen. You may need oxygen only during certain activities, while sleeping, or all the time.
- A very important part of the treatment for COPD is quitting smoking. Quitting smoking will help improve your breathing and help to stop your COPD from getting worse.
- In rare cases, surgery or lung transplants may be recommended.

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Questions for My Doctor

- How long will I need to be on medicines?
- Will COPD go away by itself?
- What are the risks or side effects from treatment?
- What changes can I make in my life to help improve my symptoms?
- What will happen if I don't quit smoking?
- Can I keep doing the things I like to do?
- What happens if I don't take my medicine?



Bottom Line

- COPD is a lung disease, most common in smokers. People with COPD have a hard time getting air in and out of their lungs.
- This causes symptoms like: coughing up a lot of mucus, wheezing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath.
- Your doctor may diagnose COPD after a test that measures how well your lungs are working, called spirometry. Your doctor may also want you to have an X-ray, CT scan, or blood test.
- Your doctor may prescribe you medicines to help improve your symptoms. Some are used every day and others are only used when your symptoms are severe.
- It is very important to quit smoking, if you are a smoker. Quitting smoking will help improve breathing and help stop your COPD from getting worse.

For More Information

- **ACP:**
www.acponline.org/cgi-bin/cpph.cgi?CPP3010_Living_With_COPD_Guide_2014_update.pdf
- **American Lung Association:**
www.lung.org/lung-disease/copd/
- **COPD Foundation:**
www.copdfoundation.org/What-is-COPD/Understanding-COPD/What-is-COPD.aspx
- **American Cancer Society:**
www.cancer.org/healthy/stayawayfromtobacco/guidetoquittingsmoking/guide-to-quitting-smoking-toc

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