

## Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, or COPD, is a severe lung disease that gets worse over time. In COPD, a person's lungs become damaged and his or her airflow becomes blocked, which makes it difficult to breathe.

The most common conditions that make up COPD are emphysema and chronic bronchitis. More than 12.7 million Americans have COPD, and it is the nation's third leading cause of death.

### What is COPD?

COPD usually is caused by exposure to airborne irritants over time, including tobacco smoke, dust, chemical fumes and pollution.

In a healthy person, the airways and air sacs inside the lungs are elastic and spring back to their original shape after they are filled with air. In a person with COPD, the air sacs become less springy. Airways also can become swollen and they might produce more mucus than normal. This can further block the now-floppy airways, which makes it more difficult to expel air from the lungs.

In a person with COPD, this damage to the airways eventually will interfere with the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the lungs.

Those with severe COPD may become short of breath with most activities and probably will be admitted to the hospital more often.

The damage caused by COPD cannot be reversed, but its symptoms can be treated and future damage can be minimized.

### Symptoms of COPD

People often don't notice the signs of COPD until they already have significant lung damage. People with COPD often have more than one of the following symptoms:

- Shortness of breath, especially with physical activity
- Wheezing
- A tight feeling in the chest
- Chronic cough, with or without mucus, which sometimes is referred to as smoker's cough
- Fatigue
- Multiple respiratory infections
- Trouble catching their breath
- A feeling of not being able to breathe or take a deep breath

### Living better with COPD

There are many things your doctor may recommend to relieve the symptoms of COPD and minimize further damage, including:

- Medications. These may be administered in the form of inhalers, nebulizers, pills or liquids.
  - Bronchodilators relax the muscles around the airway and can relieve coughing and shortness of breath
  - Inhaled steroids can reduce airway inflammation

- Antibiotics fight infections that can make COPD symptoms worse
- Expectorants can help treat the thick mucus of COPD
- Oxygen therapy
- Pulmonary rehabilitation programs
- Surgery
- Lifestyle changes such as quitting smoking
- Breathing exercises
  - Pursed lip breathing. Breathe in slowly for 2 counts. Purse your lips like you are going to whistle and then exhale slowly through pursed lips
  - Diaphragm breathing. Sit or lie back and place one hand on your stomach and the other on your upper chest. Breathe in slowly through your nose, making sure the hand on your stomach moves out while the one on your chest does not. Tighten your stomach muscles and exhale slowly through pursed lips. The hand on your stomach should move in.

**For more information, contact your physician.**

Source: [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com), [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov), [www.lung.org](http://www.lung.org), [www.copd.org](http://www.copd.org), and [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)