

COPD

What is COPD?

COPD (chronic obstructive airway disease) are lung diseases that block air flow making it difficult to breathe. In **emphysema** damaged bronchial tube and air sacs in the lung lose their elasticity and partially collapse when you exhale. You are not able to get the air out of your lungs. With **chronic bronchitis**, the coughing causes inflammation and narrowing of the bronchial tubes. The increased mucous can block the narrowed tubes even more. In **asthmatic bronchitis** (bronchial asthma) there is contraction of the muscle fibers in the lining of the airways known as bronchospasm.

What are the symptoms of COPD?

Emphysema causes symptoms of

- shortness of breath
- wheezing
- chest tightness

Chronic bronchitis causes symptoms of

- a chronic cough with yellow phlegm
- shortness of breath (in later stages)
- frequent respiratory infections
- having to clear your throat in the morning, especially if you smoke

Chronic asthmatic bronchitis has the same symptoms of chronic bronchitis but with more wheezing.

What are some of the causes of COPD?

Long term cigarette smoking is most often the cause of COPD. Other irritants include cigar, pipe, and secondhand smoke, air pollutants, and certain fumes. When stomach acid washes back up into the esophagus (GERD) can aggravate or even cause COPD.

What are the complications of COPD?

- Respiratory infections including frequent colds, flu and pneumonia
- High blood pressure may cause high blood pressure in the arteries that bring blood to your lungs (pulmonary hypertension)
- Lung cancer – smokers are at higher risk
- Heart problems are increased including heart attacks (for unknown reasons)

Treatment and medications

There is no cure for COPD and the damage cannot be undone. The goal is to prevent further damage and relieve symptoms. The first thing is to **stop all smoking!** Drinking plenty of fluids will help thin mucus and help clear airways

Medications can help the symptoms and reduce the complications and flare ups (exacerbations).

- Bronchodilators – relax the muscles around your airways
- Inhaled steroids – reduce airway inflammation (long term use can weaken bones and increase the risk of diabetes, high blood pressure and cataracts)
- Antibiotics- used only when necessary for bacterial infections such as acute bronchitis

Managing Flare ups (exacerbations)

There are times when symptoms suddenly get worse, even if are taking treatment. These can be caused by infections, change in temperature or air pollution. Seek medical attention as soon as you have a hard time breathing, have increased coughing, or a change in mucus as you may need additional medications.