

Health Tips: Understanding COPD

Every day you breathe in and out nearly 20,000 times. That's a lot of work for your lungs. Over time your likelihood of having a serious lung problem increases, especially if you smoke.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD):

COPD is a disease that makes it hard to breathe. There are two main types of COPD: emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

Symptoms Of COPD

- Shortness of breath is one of the most common symptoms of COPD. People who have COPD may feel like their chest is so tight that they cannot breathe. They may cough a lot..
- These problems develop slowly and get worse over time. For example, at first someone with COPD might only have trouble catching his or her breath when being physically active. But over time, the shortness of breath may occur even when resting.
- In older adults, COPD can sometimes be confused with asthma. If you have shortness of breath, wheezing, or other problems breathing, your doctor will be able to tell if you have COPD, asthma, or another condition.

Causes Of COPD

- COPD is often caused by smoking. Breathing secondhand smoke (someone else's smoke), air pollution, chemical fumes, a lot of dust, or other things that bother the lungs and airways over time can also cause COPD.

Tests For COPD

- If you have symptoms of COPD, see your doctor right away. Your doctor may test your lungs and how well you breathe, look at your lungs, or do other exams.

Treatment For COPD

- There is no cure for COPD. But, there are things people with COPD can do to feel better. Most important, do not smoke. Smoking is the leading cause of COPD. If you stop smoking, you may breathe more easily and could add years to your life. It's never too late to quit smoking!
- If you have COPD, your doctor might prescribe an inhaler. This is a device that gets medicine right into your lungs.
- Also, you can learn breathing techniques and other tricks to help you stay active. If your COPD gets worse, you might need to receive extra oxygen.

Your Care

Your doctor will do a medical exam and order tests such as:

- Chest x-ray
- CT scan
- Blood test
- Pulmonary function test

The damage to your lungs from COPD cannot be reversed and there is no cure. With the help of your health care team, you can manage the disease to slow its progress. To manage your COPD:

- Stay active.
- Quit smoking.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Drink a lot of fluids.
- Control stress.
- Take your medicines such as inhalers, steroids and antibiotics as ordered.
- Do home oxygen therapy if ordered.
- Attend a pulmonary rehab program to learn about COPD and exercise to improve your health.

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