



CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD)

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) — the third leading cause of death in the US — is a group of lung maladies that block airflow and make breathing difficult.

Chronic bronchitis and emphysema are the two most common conditions that make up COPD. Chronic bronchitis is an inflammation of the lining of your bronchial tubes, which carry air to and from your lungs. Emphysema occurs when the air sacs at the end of the smallest air passages in the lungs are gradually destroyed.

Damage to your lungs from COPD can't be reversed, but you can take steps to prevent more damage and to feel better.

Smoking is almost always the cause of COPD. Cigarette smoke weakens the lungs' defense against infections, narrows air passages, causes swelling in air tubes and destroys air sacs. According to the American Lung Association, nearly 90 percent of all COPD is caused by cigarette smoking.

Smoking cessation is the first and foremost priority for COPD treatment and management. Other causes of severe or chronic breathing problems include air pollution and occupational air quality, while a small number of people have a rare form of COPD called alpha-1 (AAT) related emphysema. This form of COPD is caused by an inherited lack of a protective protein in the blood.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

The main symptoms of COPD are:

- A long-lasting (chronic) cough, sometimes called "smoker's cough"
- Shortness of breath while doing everyday activities
- Producing a lot of sputum, phlegm, or mucus
- Wheezing

In addition, an acute exacerbation of COPD can occur when patients experience shortness of breath or increased sputum production.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If you're a smoker or feel otherwise at risk for COPD, or you have symptoms of COPD, you should ask your physician for a spirometry test, a simple exam where you blow air into a mouthpiece and tubing attached to a small machine. Your doctor will determine next steps for managing your condition.

DID YOU KNOW?

Best Doctors is a confidential benefit offered by your employer at no cost to you

34% of Best Doctors' cases see a change in diagnosis, and 68% see a change in treatment

If you have been diagnosed with COPD or are facing a medical decision, Best Doctors is here to help.

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