

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

COPD is a lung disease that gets worse over time and makes it hard to breathe. There are two main conditions that cause COPD:

- **Emphysema** causes irritation to the alveoli or air sacs in the lungs. Over time, the air sacs are damaged and this reduces air exchange in the lungs. As a result, it becomes harder to move oxygen into or carbon dioxide out of the blood.
- **Chronic bronchitis** involves irritation and mucus build up in the large and small airways in the lungs. The lining of the airways gets thick and it makes it harder to breathe.

Most people with COPD have both of these conditions.

What does COPD mean?

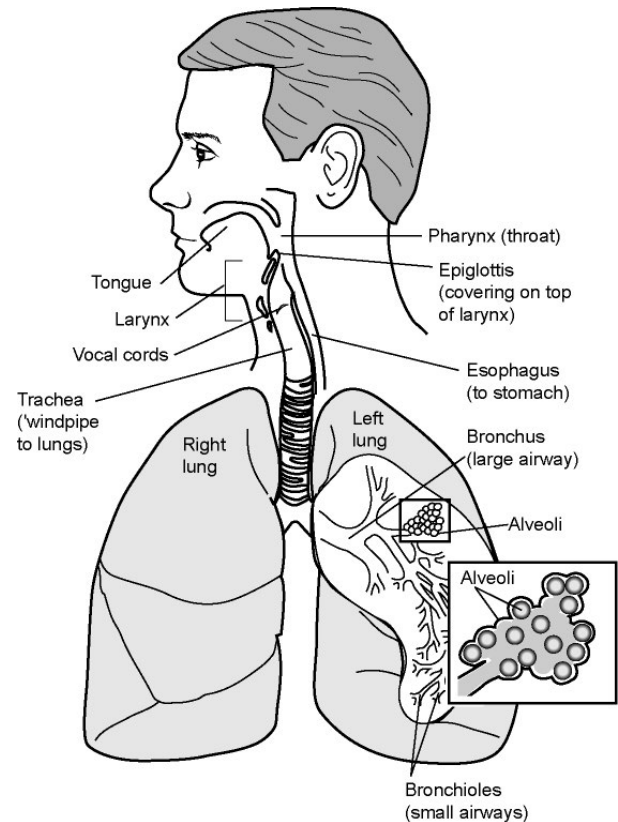
- **Chronic** means that this disease lasts a long time and it is always present. You can control the progress of the disease but it is not going away.
- **Obstructive** refers to the air flow in and out of your lungs being blocked. This happens because of swelling or extra mucus in your airways.
- **Pulmonary** means the disease is in your lungs.
- **Disease** refers to the damage that has occurred in your lungs. This disease develops slowly. Treatment can ease signs and slow the disease's progress.

With COPD, the flow of air out of the lungs is blocked. This causes stale air to become trapped in the lungs. The trapping of air makes it harder for the lungs to get enough oxygen out to the rest of the body. There is not a problem of getting enough air in, but rather of getting the air out.

Signs of COPD

- Coughing, with or without mucus
- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath that gets worse with activity
- Chest tightness

For some people, these signs are mild and do not cause serious breathing problems. For others, the signs can be serious enough to limit daily activities.



The main causes of COPD

- Smoking or secondhand smoke
- Working in a polluted environment where you breathe in large amounts of dust, fumes, smoke or gases

Managing COPD

You can treat and manage COPD to help you to feel better and slow the disease's progress.

- Stay active. Talk to your doctor about attending a Pulmonary Rehab Program to learn more about your disease and exercises to improve your health.
- Quit smoking or avoid being around others who smoke.
- Eat a balanced diet and manage your weight.
- Drink a lot of fluids each day unless your doctor wants you to limit fluids because of other health problems.
- Take your medicines as ordered by your doctor.
- Learn how to manage the stress in your life.
- Talk with your doctor and others on your health care team to develop a COPD action plan for your care if your signs get worse so you know what to do.
- Get a flu vaccine each year and talk to your doctor about getting a pneumonia vaccine.
- Use home oxygen therapy if ordered.

The damage lung diseases cause over time cannot be reversed. As COPD gets worse, lung transplant or surgery to remove part of the lungs may be options to talk about with your doctor.

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

The Library for Health Information is available to help you find more health information at (614) 293-3707 or e-mail: health-info@osu.edu.