

COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease)

DESCRIPTION

COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) is a combination of chronic bronchitis and emphysema. The two conditions can occur separately but often develop together.

- Chronic bronchitis occurs when inflammation and excess mucus clog and narrow the airways in your lungs, making breathing difficult
- Emphysema is the result of damage to tiny air sacs (alveoli) in the lungs, making breathing difficult.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Shortness of breath with or without exercise that tends to worsen over time
- Rapid breathing
- Wheezing
- Frequent, deep cough or coughing spasms
- Productive cough for prolonged periods (“colds” that do not seem to go away)
- Thick yellow or green phlegm
- Barrel-shaped chest
- Swelling in the legs and feet.

CAUSES

Chronic bronchitis and emphysema are both caused by irritation of your airways over a long period of time.

- Smoking (the greatest risk factor)
- Exposure to air pollutants and dusts
- Repeated lung infections
- History of asthma or bronchitis
- Occupations that require exceptional forced breathing such as glass blowing.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Do not smoke
- Avoid places with polluted air
- Ask your physician about getting your flu and pneumonia shots
- Obtain antibiotic treatment for lung infections
- Avoid people with colds or other infections.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Chronic bronchitis and emphysema may shorten your life span, especially if you continue to smoke. Although COPD cannot be cured, treatment can relieve symptoms and prevent the condition from getting worse.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis usually is made by history and exam combined with lung tests such as spirometry and a chest X-ray.

TREATMENT

- Stop smoking
- Stay as active as possible, because inactivity leads to increased disability
- Install air conditioning with a filter and humidity control
- Avoid sudden temperature changes
- Avoid high altitudes where the air is thin
- Drink at least eight glasses of water a day.

MEDICATIONS

- Bronchodilators (Atrovent , Proventil or Ventolin (albuterol), Combivent , Serevent and theophylline) work to open the airways and make breathing easier
- Inhaled or oral steroids may be helpful in decreasing lung inflammation
- Antibiotics may be needed to fight secondary or chronic infections
- Do not use cough suppressants
- Oxygen may be needed.

CONSIDER NOTIFYING YOUR PHYSICIAN IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Fever
- Blood in the sputum
- Chest pain that develops or increases
- Increased shortness of breath at rest
- Sputum that thickens or changes color, despite treatment.