

Coronary Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

“COPD is a major cause of death and illness, and it is the fourth leading cause of death in the U.S. and throughout the world.”

— *National Heart Lung and Blood Institute*

What is COPD?

COPD is a lung disease, that makes it hard to breath because the lungs are damaged. In COPD, the airways – tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs – are partly blocked, making it difficult to get air in and out.

In COPD, the airways and air sacs lose their shape and become limp. Less air gets in and less air goes out because:

- The airways and air sacs lose their elasticity (like an old rubber band)
- The walls between many of the air sacs are damaged
- The walls of the airways become thick and

inflamed (swollen)

- Cells in the airways make more mucus than usual, clogging the airways

COPD develops slowly, generally from behavioral or environmental influences. It may be many years before you notice symptoms like feeling short of breath. Most of the time, COPD is diagnosed in people who are middle-aged or older.

Causes?

Smoking is the most common cause of COPD.

Most cases of COPD develop after repeatedly breathing in fumes and other things that irritate and damage the lungs and airways. Common irritants that cause COPD are:

- Cigarette smoking (most common for cause)
- Pipe, cigar and other types of tobacco smoke
- Breathing in other fumes and dusts over a long period of time



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The lungs and airways are highly sensitive to these irritants. They cause the airways to become inflamed and narrowed, and they destroy the elastic fibers that allow the lung to stretch and then return to its resting shape. This makes breathing air in and out of the lungs more difficult.

Other things that may irritate the lungs and contribute to COPD include:

- Working around certain kinds of chemicals and breathing in the fumes for many years
- Working in a dusty area over many years
- Heavy exposure to air pollution
- Being around secondhand smoke (smoke in the air from other people smoking cigarettes)

Signs and Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of COPD include:

- Cough
- Mucus production
- Shortness of breath, especially with exercise
- Wheezing (a whistling or squeaky sound when you breathe)



- Chest tightness
- A cough that doesn't go away and coughing up lots of mucus

These signs and symptoms often occur years before the flow of air in and out of the lungs is reduced. However, not everyone with a cough and sputum production goes on to develop COPD, and not everyone with COPD has a cough.

The severity of the symptoms depends on how much of the lung has been destroyed. If you continue to smoke, the lung destruction is faster than if you stop smoking.

Prevention

If you smoke, the most important thing you can do to stop more damage to your lungs is to quit smoking. It is also important to stay away from people who are smoking and places where you know there will be smokers.

Staying away from other lung irritants such as pollution, dust, and certain cooking or heating fumes is also important. For example, you should stay in your house when the outside air quality is poor.

Treatment

Quitting smoking is the single most important thing you can do to reduce your risk of developing COPD and slow the progress of the disease.

Your doctor will recommend treatments that help relieve your symptoms and help you breathe easier.

The goals of COPD treatment are to:

- Relieve your symptoms with no or minimal side effects of treatment
- Slow the progress of the disease
- Improve exercise tolerance (your ability to stay active)
- Prevent and treat complications and sudden onset of problems
- Improve your overall health

The treatment for COPD is different for each person. Your family doctor may recommend that you see a lung specialist called a pulmonologist.

Treatment is based on whether your symptoms are mild, moderate, or severe.

Medicines and pulmonary rehabilitation (rehab) are often used to help relieve your symptoms and to help you breathe more easily and stay active.

For more information about COPD, visit the National Institutes of Health at www.nih.gov.

For more information about Nationwide Better Health visit: www.nationwide.com/betterhealth

Or contact your Benefits Representative.



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