



Take control

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, can make your lungs feel like they are working too hard. But there is good news. There are things you can do to help you breathe easier. The first step is to understand your condition, so you can keep your lungs functioning at their best.

There are two conditions that fall under the COPD umbrella:

- **Chronic bronchitis:** This is when the walls of the airways get inflamed, swell and clog up with mucus.
- **Emphysema:** This is when the smaller airways and air sacs within your lungs stretch out and break down.

It's possible to have only one of these conditions. But in many cases, both go hand in hand. Here are the symptoms:

- **Cough:** A "smoker's cough" is usually the first sign; it comes and goes at first, then gradually becomes more and more persistent.
- **Breathlessness/wheezing:** This starts out when you exert yourself in some way, like walking up a slight incline. Continuing to smoke with COPD will make it even harder to breathe.
- **Phlegm:** Damaged airways produce more mucus than normal. As the disease progresses, you will cough up more each day.
- **Chest infections:** Mucus often turns green or yellow; coughing, breathlessness and wheezing become even worse with infection.

Controlling COPD

You might not be able to reverse the damage to your airways. But there are plenty of steps you can take to keep your symptoms under control:

- **Stop smoking:** You will see huge differences when you quit smoking. It's never too late to stop, and it will slow down the disease's progression. If you're having trouble quitting, ask your doctor for help.
- **Lose weight:** Being overweight can make you more breathless.
- **Get your annual vaccinations:** Go for your yearly flu vaccine as well as a one-time immunisation for pneumococcus (pneumonia).
- **Exercise regularly:** Keeping active can cut your risk of heart disease, stroke and COPD. Studies show that people who exercise regularly with this condition breathe better, improve their symptoms and have a better quality of life. Aim for 20 to 30 minutes of brisk activity, at least four to five days a week.

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Treating COPD

The best treatment for COPD is to stop smoking. But if symptoms flare up, there are many other treatments available, such as:

- Short- and long-acting inhalers to expand the airways
- Steroid inhalers to reduce inflammation
- Steroid tablets to ease flare-ups
- Medicines to make it easier to cough up phlegm
- Antibiotics to help clear chest infections
- Oxygen for severe symptoms (up to 16 hours a day, or a short burst)
- Surgery to remove a section of the lung that is damaged from COPD

You should work with your doctor to find the best course of action for you.

Take control of COPD — get on the path to a healthier you.

Source: Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. Available at www.patient.co.uk/health/Chronic-Obstructive-Pulmonary-Disease.htm. Accessed 24 January 2017.

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