

Condition:



Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

What is it?

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is the generic name for lung conditions that cause breathing difficulties.

Definitions

Chronic: a long-term illness and does not go away

Obstructive: airways are narrowed, making it hard to breathe out quickly

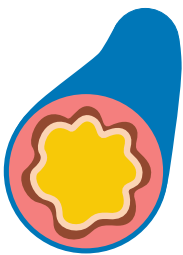
Pulmonary: it affects the lungs

Disease: a medical illness

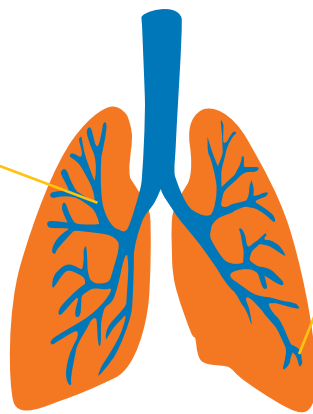
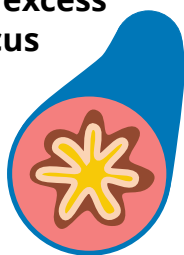
Two of these lung illnesses are bronchitis and emphysema which can occur together. They affect the lung tubes airways and the lung tissue.

Bronchitis

Healthy

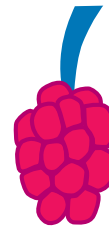


Inflammation and excess mucus

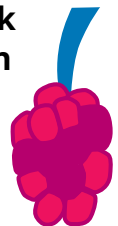


Emphysema

Healthy



Alveolar membranes break down



With bronchitis the airways become swollen and narrowed. This often makes more mucus.

Emphysema is where the lung tissue, air sacs are damaged and the elasticity is lost, leaving them enlarged.

Causes

In most of cases COPD is caused by smoking, but can also be caused by exposure to harmful chemicals or dust (usually work related), passive smoke, air pollution, and a small percentage of people are more likely to get COPD due their genetic susceptibility. Another cause could be asthma, but this is not common.

Symptoms

The main symptoms of COPD are:

- Producing more mucus than usual
- Persistent wheezing
- Breathlessness
- Chesty cough that last a long time
- Recurring chest infections

The symptoms may be brought on by environmental pollution, sprays such as household and hygiene products. The extremes in weather can also bring on the COPD symptoms.

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosing COPD begins with the GP, who will check if you are or have smoked and/ or been exposed to dust, fumes or chemicals. The GP will listen to your lungs and if there are any signs of COPD, a spirometry test will be arranged. A spirometry test involves blowing into a machine that measures the amount of air breathed out.

Other tests may be done to make sure that other causes are eliminated. This could involve a blood test and an x-ray respectively. There may be a need for a referral to a specialist medical professional to confirm the diagnosis.

Recommended Treatments

Medication

In some cases medication may be prescribed to reduce the symptoms of breathlessness and reduce the affect of a flare up.

- Inhalers are a type of medications that are inhaled to open up airways.
- A steroid inhaler will reduce swelling and inflammation in the airways.
- Antibiotics are prescribed if you suffer from a chest infection

Pulmonary rehabilitation

Pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) is an individually tailored programme comprising a combination of exercise and education about lung health. The PR course is approximately six to eight weeks, with two sessions of about two hours each week. It is available in many local areas via GP referral

Self-Management



Smoking cessation

Smokers are encouraged to give it up as soon as possible. NHS support is offered free www.nhs.uk/smokefree

Inhalers technique

Inhalers maybe used to relieve short and long term breathing difficulties and only help if used correctly. Seek advice from a health professional or pharmacist, if unsure.

Managing breathlessness

When you're out of breath, you may feel like you need more air. So you may start to take more air into your lungs or breathe faster. Breathing techniques can teach you to breathe more efficiently and to feel in control of your breathing

Weight management

Being overweight makes breathing and moving around harder. If underweight, breathing muscles may be weaker and the body will have less strength to fight off infections.

Healthy Eating

Eating a healthy balance diet can help you to keep a healthy weight, energy and nutrients that your body needs as well as helping you to feel your best

Exercise

Being active and exercising can help to improve breathing. Avoiding activities that cause breathlessness can affect fitness levels. Regular exercise can help reverse this by strengthening muscles

Relaxation

Relaxation skills could be helpful for tense muscles in the body and to unwinding the mind. Relaxation techniques such as breathing techniques or doing something like reading a book, listening to music can be helpful.

Flu jab

Having the flu jab may reduce your risk of developing the flu which can have an impact on your lungs on top of the having COPD.

Useful links

Helpline



Five ways to boost your wellbeing



Take notice
Be mindful



Be active
Physical activity



Keep learning
New hobbies



Connect
Reduce social isolation



Give back
Do something nice