

## What causes COPD?

Cigarette smoking is by far the most common cause of COPD. Exposure to air pollution and dusts or fumes at work can also cause COPD. Genetic factors can also play a part.

## Effect of smoking on the lungs

Lung function gets worse as part of normal aging in non-smokers, but smoking can speed up this process (look at the following diagram). Quitting smoking can slow the decline in lung function. It's never too late to quit.

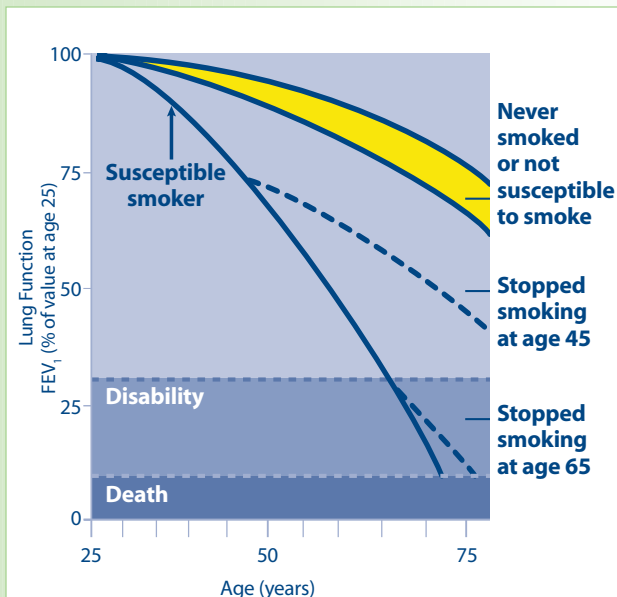


Figure adapted from: Fletcher C and Peto R. The natural history of chronic airflow obstruction. *BMJ* 1977;1:1645-1648.

## More information

For further patient information, visit the American Thoracic Society website at: <http://www.thoracic.org/sections/copd/resources/copdpatient.pdf>.



## Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) Patient Information

COPD is a term used to describe chronic bronchitis, emphysema, or both. Chronic bronchitis involves increased mucus production and chronic cough. Emphysema involves damage to the air sacs of the lung. Some people with COPD may also have asthma. People with COPD have difficulty exhaling air from their lungs, causing shortness of breath and tiredness.



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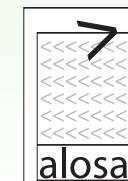
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## How can I tell if I have COPD?

Shortness of breath, chronic cough, and chronic mucus production often occur in COPD. **If you have any of these symptoms, see your health care provider.** He/she may order a breathing test called spirometry. This simple, non-invasive, and painless test can show if you have lung disease. Early detection of COPD is important to get the maximum benefits of treatment.

## Sudden worsening of COPD

A rapid worsening of your symptoms can sometimes occur. It is very important to try and prevent these events from happening, and to recognize and treat them early and aggressively if they do occur. **If you notice a sudden worsening of your symptoms, seek medical help immediately.**

## What should I do?

**The single most important treatment for COPD is to stop smoking.**



Although the lung damage from COPD is permanent, there are treatments that can reduce symptoms, improve your ability to exercise, and improve your quality of life.

Ask your doctor about non-drug and drug treatments; they can do a lot to help you.

## Non-drug treatment

Non-drug treatments include:

- Programs to help you quit smoking;
- Exercise;
- Pulmonary rehabilitation;
- Vaccines against flu and pneumonia;
- Good nutrition; and
- Home oxygen (when needed).

Pulmonary rehabilitation programs involve education and exercise classes to teach you about your condition, how to exercise, and how to better deal with your condition.

## Drug treatment

Many medicines for COPD are given with an inhaler device, so that the drugs can go directly into the lung. Some medications should be taken every day, while others are only used when symptoms such as shortness of breath occur. Medications used in COPD may include:

- **Drugs to help you quit smoking** such as nicotine patches or gum that help reduce cravings for cigarettes.

- **Bronchodilators** – these medications open up the airways and can make it easier to breathe. They are usually given in an inhaler device and sometimes in a device called a nebulizer.
- **Steroids** – these are usually given in an inhaler device and may also be given as oral medication if there is a sudden worsening of your condition.
- **Antibiotics** – given if you have an infection.



## Using your inhaler

There are a wide variety of inhaler devices available and you may need to use more than one. To get maximum benefit from your medicine and to minimize side effects, it is very important that you know how to use and maintain each inhaler device. Some tips for use:

- Get your doctor or pharmacist to show you how to use the device and then demonstrate your technique back to them.
- Review the use of your inhaler with your doctor or pharmacist at least every 3 months and anytime that your condition suddenly worsens.