



# What You Can Do About a Lung Disease Called COPD



**Adults may have COPD if they have trouble breathing or a cough that will not go away.**

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BASED ON THE GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR THE DIAGNOSIS, MANAGEMENT, AND PREVENTION  
OF CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE LUNG DISEASE,

Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD)

Available at [www.goldcopd.org](http://www.goldcopd.org)

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Doctors cannot cure COPD, but they can help to improve your symptoms and slow the damage to your lungs.



When you follow the instructions of your doctor,  
You will feel less short of breath.  
You will cough less.  
You will get stronger and get around better.  
You will be in a better mood.

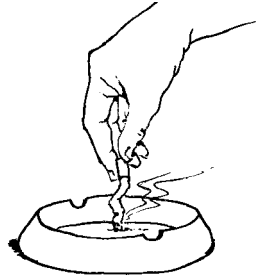
**COPD** stands for  
“Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease”.

The word **Chronic** means it won't go away.  
The word **Obstructive** means partly blocked.  
The word **Pulmonary** means in the lungs.  
The word **Disease** means sickness.

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## What you and your family can do about COPD.

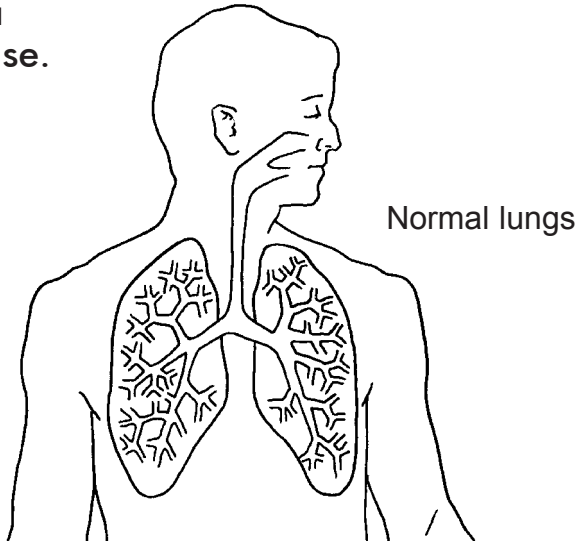
1. Stop smoking.
2. Take each medicine the way the doctor says to take it. Go to the doctor at least two times a year for checkups. Ask if you can get a flu shot.
3. Go to the hospital or doctor right away if your breathing gets bad.
4. Keep the air clean at home. Stay away from things like smoke that make it hard to breathe.
5. Keep your body strong. Walk, exercise regularly and eat healthy foods.
6. If your COPD is severe, get the most out of your breath. Make life as easy as possible at home.



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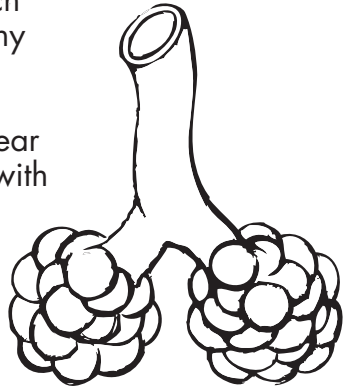
# What is COPD?

COPD is a lung disease.



Airways carry air to the lungs. Airways get smaller and smaller like branches of a tree. At the end of each tiny branch there are many small air sacs—like tiny balloons.

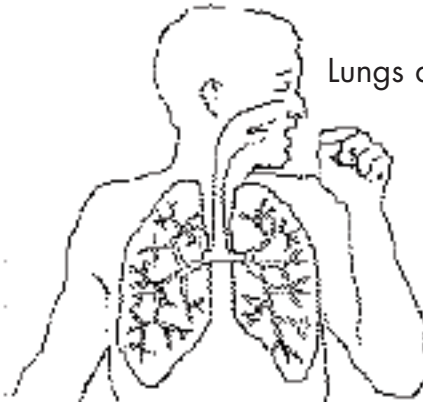
In healthy people, each airway is clear and open. Each tiny air sac fills up with air. Then the air quickly goes out.



Close-up of normal airway and air sacs

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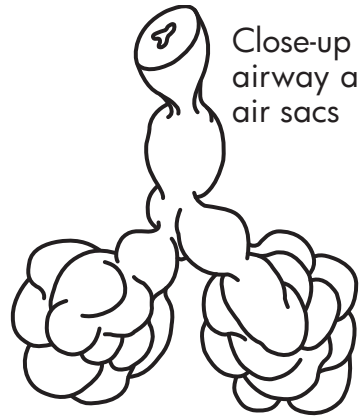
When you have COPD, you can have problems with your lungs.



Lungs damaged by COPD

1. The openings of the airways are smaller. Less air gets in because:

- The walls of the airways get thick and swollen.
- The airways are squeezed by small muscles around them.
- The airways make mucus that you cough up.



Close-up of airway and air sacs

2. The tiny air sacs cannot empty and your lungs feel very full.

Your doctor can help you understand the problems you have with your lungs.

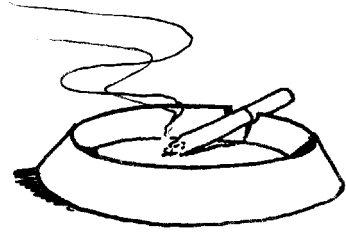
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# Who gets COPD?

You cannot get COPD from someone else.

Adults get COPD, not children.

Most people with COPD are smokers or were smokers in the past. Any form of smoking can cause COPD.



Some people with COPD have lived in homes filled with fumes from cooking stoves or fumes from heaters used to warm the home.

Some people with COPD worked for many years in places that were very dusty or smoky.

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Go to a doctor when you first have problems with breathing or problems with a cough that lasts for more than a month.



Most people wait to go to the doctor until they are having a lot of trouble breathing. They ignore a cough or mild breathing problem for years.

Many people with COPD are at least 40 years old. But people younger than age 40 can also get COPD.

When you have breathing problems, the sooner you see a doctor about COPD, the better.

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Doctors can tell you how bad your COPD has become.

The doctor or nurse will examine you. You may have to do some simple breathing tests.

They will ask you about your breathing and your health.

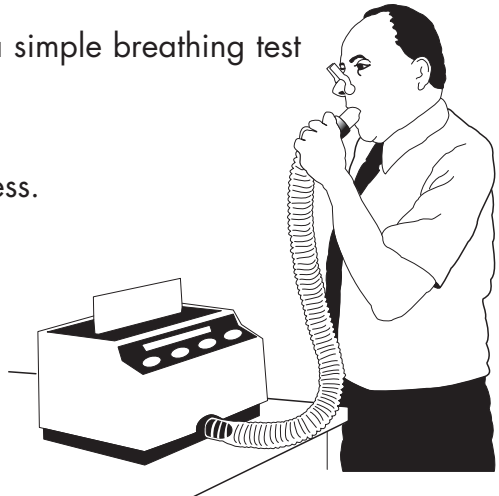
They will ask about your home and the places you have worked.

- If COPD is not too bad, it is called Mild COPD.
- If COPD is getting bad, it is called Moderate COPD.
- If COPD is very bad, it is called Severe COPD.

COPD is diagnosed with a simple breathing test called spirometry.

This test is easy and painless.

You will be asked to breathe hard into a rubber tube connected to a machine called a spirometer.





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## Mild COPD

- You may cough a lot. Sometimes you cough up mucus.
- You feel a little out of breath if you work hard or walk rapidly.

## Moderate COPD

- You may cough more, and you cough up mucus.
- You often feel out of breath if you work hard or walk rapidly.
- You may have trouble doing hard work or chores.
- You may take several weeks to recover from a cold or chest infection.

## Severe or very bad COPD

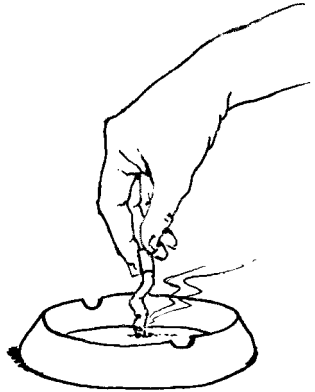
- You may cough even more and cough up a lot of mucus.
- You have trouble breathing both day and night.
- You may take several weeks to recover from a cold or chest infection.
- You can no longer go to work or do chores around home.
- You cannot walk up stairs or across the room very well.
- You tire easily.

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## What you and your family can do to help slow the damage to your lungs.

1. Stop smoking. It is the most important thing you can do to help your lungs.

- You can stop smoking.
- Ask for help from a doctor or nurse. Ask about pills, special gum, or special patches for your skin to help you stop smoking.
- Set a date to quit. Tell family and friends you are trying to quit. Ask them to keep cigarettes out of the house. Ask people to smoke away from home or smoke outside.
- Stay away from the places and people that make you want to smoke. Remove ashtrays from your home.
- Keep busy. Keep your hands busy. Try holding a pencil instead of a cigarette.
- When the craving is bad, chew gum or a toothpick. Snack on fruits or vegetables. Drink water.
- Think about quitting just 1 day at a time.
- If you start smoking again, don't give up! Try to stop again. Some people have to stop many times before they stop forever.



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2. See your doctor. Take medicine the way the doctor says to take it.

Go for your checkups.

Go at least two times a year, even if you feel fine.

Ask to have your lungs tested.

Ask a doctor or nurse how to get a flu shot each year.

Talk about your medicines at each visit.

Medicine comes in many forms such as inhalers, pills, and syrup.

Ask the doctor to write down the name of each medicine, how much to take and when to take it.

If your doctor tells you to use inhaled medicines, you will need to learn to use an inhaler.

Bring the medicines or the list of your medicines to each checkup.

Talk about how your medicines make you feel.

After the checkup, show your family your list of medicines. Keep the list at home where everyone can find it.



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3. Go to the hospital or doctor right away if your breathing gets a lot worse.

Plan now for problems in the future. Put the things you will need in one place so you can act fast.

- Phone numbers for the doctor, the hospital, and people who can get you there.
- Directions to the hospital and doctor's office.
- Your list of medicines.
- Some extra money.

Get emergency help if you see any of these danger signs.

- It is hard to talk.
- It is hard to walk.
- Lips or fingernails turn gray or blue.
- The heartbeat or pulse is very fast or irregular.
- Your medicine does not help for very long or it does not help at all. Breathing is still fast and hard.

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4. Keep the air clean at home. Stay away from smoke and fumes that make it hard to breathe.

- Keep smoke, fumes, and strong smells out of the home.
- If you must have your home painted or sprayed for insects, do it when you can stay somewhere else.



- Cook near an open door or window so smoke and strong smells can get out easily. Do not cook near the place you sleep or spend most of your time.
- If you heat with wood or kerosene, keep a door or window open a little to get rid of fumes.
- Open doors and windows when the air inside is smoky or has strong smells. Close the windows and stay at home on days when there is a lot of pollution or dust outside.

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**5. Keep your body strong.**

**Learn breathing exercises.**

Breathing exercises can help you when you are having trouble breathing. They can strengthen the muscles you need for breathing.



Ask your doctor to explain the breathing exercises that would be best for you.

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## Walk and exercise regularly.

When you strengthen the muscles in your arms, legs, and body, you can get around better.

Walking for 20 minutes is a good way to start.

These exercises help build strength in your arms, legs, and body. There are many others.

When you start, take it slow.  
When you feel short of breath,  
stop and rest.

Pick a place to walk or exercise  
that you enjoy.



Find exercises that you like to do.

Ask someone in the family or a friend to join you.

Talk with your doctor about the right exercise regimen for you.

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## Eat healthy foods. Get to a healthy weight.

Ask your family to help you buy and prepare healthy foods. Eat lots of fruit and vegetables. Eat protein foods, like meat, fish, eggs, milk, and soy.



### When you eat:

- If you are short of breath when you eat, slow down.
- Talk less when you eat.
- If you feel full easily, eat smaller meals more often.
- If you are heavy, lose weight. It is harder to breathe and to get around if you are heavy.
- If you are too thin, take extra foods or drinks to help gain weight and stay healthy.



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6. If your COPD is severe, get the most out of each breath. Make life as easy as possible at home.

Ask your friends and family for help and ideas.

Do things slowly. Do things sitting down.

In the kitchen, bathroom, and sleeping area, put things you need in one place that is easy to reach.

Find very simple ways to cook, clean, and do other chores. Use a small table or cart on wheels to move things around. Use a pole or tongs with long handles to help reach things.

Keep your clothes loose so you can breathe. Wear clothes and shoes that are easy to put on.

Ask people to help you move your things in your home so you will not need to climb stairs as often.



Pick a place to sit that you can enjoy and where others can visit.

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**Plan ahead if you want to go out or go away.**

Visit or go out during the part of the day when you feel your best. Many people feel best right after they take medicine.

Rest after you eat.

Plan to go out at a time when you can get home before the next dose of medicine needs to be taken.



Do not go to stores at a busy time of day. Go to places that do not have a lot of stairs.

Bring phone numbers for the doctor and people who can help you. Bring medicine if you do not feel well.

If you are not having a good day, stay home.

**Going out of town.**

If you will travel far, or will be gone for more than a day, ask the doctor what to bring if you have problems.



## Clinic information:

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The following publications are available from the  
**Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD):**

- (1) ***Global Strategy for the Diagnosis, Management, and Prevention of COPD.***  
Scientific information and recommendations for COPD programs;
- (2) ***Executive Summary: Global Strategy for the Diagnosis, Management, and Prevention of COPD;***
- (3) ***Pocket Guide to COPD Management and Prevention.***  
Summary of patient care information for primary health care professionals; and
- (4) ***What You Can Do About a Lung Disease Called COPD.***  
An information booklet for patients and their families.

These publications are available on the GOLD web site at <http://www.goldcopd.org>.