Your Go-to COPD Guide

Learning how to live with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

Inside, you’ll learn:
- COPD facts
- COPD symptoms and triggers
- How to talk with your doctor
- Different treatment options
- Tips for better living and more
Finding out you or someone you love may have COPD isn’t easy. It can lead to feelings of anger, fear, and even denial. But by reading this booklet, you’re taking the first step in helping to control your symptoms.

Inside, you’ll get the facts about COPD along with some treatment options available, and learn how to stay positive and proactive as you, or a loved one, prepares to live with COPD.

Ready to take control?

Let’s begin.
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COPD Facts

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, is a lung disease that makes it harder for air to flow into and out of your lungs. COPD can’t be cured, and the damage to your lungs worsens over time.

That’s why it’s important to talk to your doctor and seek treatment as soon as you start showing symptoms of a persistent breathing problem.
You may have also heard your doctor mention emphysema or chronic bronchitis.

Emphysema damages the air sacs (alveoli) in your lungs, making it hard to exhale. In chronic bronchitis, airway irritation and mucus production mean that air has a hard time getting through.

Emphysema and chronic bronchitis are the two conditions that make up COPD. You could have one of them or both.

If you're not sure you understood your diagnosis, follow up with your doctor. And if you haven't been diagnosed with COPD but are experiencing constant breathing problems—especially breathlessness—talk to your doctor right away.
While smoking is the main cause of COPD, other causes can include air pollution, chemical fumes, dust, or industrial smoke.

What causes COPD?

COPD is caused by long-term exposure to things that irritate your airways and damage the air sacs in your lungs. While smoking is the main cause of COPD, other causes can include air pollution, chemical fumes, dust, or smoke.

If you have asthma, be sure to mention this to your doctor before starting another treatment, as you may not be able to safely use certain daily maintenance medications to treat your COPD.
How many people have COPD?
The truth is, you’re not alone. 15 million people in the United States have been diagnosed with COPD. As many as 12 million more have yet to be diagnosed, and may not even be aware that they have this condition.

COPD TIP: Keep track of your COPD triggers to help create a COPD action plan. After all, the more you know about what sets off your COPD symptoms, the easier it will be to avoid them and enjoy your day.
Symptoms and Triggers

Many people can live with COPD for a while before they feel any symptoms or are diagnosed. But as COPD progresses, symptoms become more severe, and may include:

- A persistent cough ("smoker’s cough")
- Shortness of breath, mostly brought on by physical activity
- Wheezing, whistling, or squeaky sound when you breathe
- Chest tightness
If you have symptoms for more than a few weeks, you owe it to yourself to find out what’s going on.

If you have any of the symptoms on the previous page for more than a few weeks, you owe it to yourself to find out what’s going on—especially if you’ve never discussed this with your doctor before.

Certain triggers can cause COPD symptoms to worsen. It’s important to avoid or limit exposure to known triggers, like extreme hot or cold weather, air pollution, infections, and stress.
Tell your doctor what you’re feeling and if you’re still smoking.

Tell your doctor how you’re feeling and if you’re still smoking. Even though it’s not always easy to talk openly with your doctor, it is the best way to find out how to better manage your symptoms.

**COPD TIP:** The hardest thing you’re going to have to do is also the most important: be open and honest with your doctor. Why? Because it’s the best thing you can do to better manage your COPD.
Sometimes the symptoms of COPD are similar to the symptoms of other illnesses like asthma, pneumonia, the flu, or even the common cold. So it’s important to rely on your doctor’s diagnosis to know exactly what you have, and how to treat it.

If you’ve been having breathing problems but haven’t been diagnosed with COPD, read on for a few things you should know.
Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and medical history, do a physical exam, and have you do breathing tests.

The main breathing test used to confirm COPD is called spirometry. This measures how much air you can breathe out of your lungs, and how fast.

Other tests may include a chest X-ray or a chest computed tomography (CT) scan, as well as an arterial blood gas test.
Talking to your doctor

If you’ve already been diagnosed, accepting and opening up about your COPD can be hard. But it’s important. After all, your doctor looks after your health and is here to help you.

People who have an open and healthy relationship with their doctor are more likely to be happier with their treatment.
Let your doctor know if you’re taking any medications or are still smoking or trying to quit. Ask how you can better manage your COPD symptoms, whether or not your current treatment is working, or if adding a maintenance treatment might help.

If you use a rescue inhaler for sudden symptoms, make sure to tell your doctor how often you rely on it.

Go to page 21 to learn more about treatment options ➔
Being open and honest gives your doctor the information they need to recommend the right treatment for your COPD.

**COPD TIP:** If you have difficulty talking to or understanding your doctor, bring a family member or friend to your next appointment. It’s a great way to build up your support system.

Whether you are meeting with your primary care doctor or a specialist, such as a pulmonologist, being open and honest gives them the information they need to recommend the right treatment for your COPD.
Managing Your Symptoms

Taking charge of your symptoms starts with knowing what to do. Below are a few suggestions.

Quit smoking
If you smoke, there’s no denying it: quitting is hard. The average person “quits” smoking multiple times before they’re successful. Whether this is your first time quitting or your tenth, don’t give up, because it’s the single best way to help your breathing problems.

There are lots of ways you can get help. You can call the American Lung Association at 800-LUNGUSA, visit smokefree.gov, and talk to your doctor to see how they can help.
Stress is a part of life.

Reduce stress

It’s easier said than done. After all, stress is a part of life. But the good news is there are ways to help reduce stress for your overall well-being.

1. Avoid situations that can cause it

2. Control how you respond to stressful situations. Don’t get too worked up or anxious. While you may not be able to control the situation, you can try to control yourself

3. Learning how to better manage your time can help make life easier, less stressful, and more meaningful
Find a balance between personal, work, and family needs.

4. Find a balance between personal, work, and family needs

5. Get enough sleep so your body can recover from the stresses of the day

6. Begin daily breathing exercises, like pursed-lip breathing. Talk to your doctor about pulmonary rehabilitation, a program that can help you to live well with your COPD

To learn more, visit copdfoundation.org

COPD TIP: Is it possible to make a situation less stressful? Absolutely. By paying attention during stressful situations, you can better prepare for the next time they occur.
Stay active. Even a little goes a long way.

When it’s tough to breathe, exercise and activities become harder. But even a little bit of activity can help you live a healthier lifestyle.

While regular exercise can help improve your symptoms, mood, sleep, and endurance, you don’t need to join a gym.
Simple activities can be done at home without any exercise equipment, like walking, dancing, and yoga. Turn your activity into a game, or a challenge—and find a way to make it part of a regular routine. Just make sure to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise plan.

**COPD TIP:** Staying active can be a challenge. Ask a family member or friend to join in the fun. It’s a great way to catch up and stay motivated at the same time.
The Right Treatment

If you have COPD, there is a variety of treatment options available. Many COPD treatments are inhaled, so that the medicine reaches your lungs directly. There are several types of inhaled treatments.

**Rescue inhalers** are short acting and used to quickly improve breathing when COPD symptoms suddenly worsen. Rescue medicines are an important part of managing your COPD symptoms, but if you find yourself using your rescue inhaler more than a few times a week, your COPD symptoms may not be under control. You may want to ask your doctor if a maintenance treatment can help.
A daily maintenance medication can make a big difference over the long term.

Maintenance therapy works to help keep airways open for up to 24 hours and manages your symptoms consistently over the long term. Some are available in steroid-free options, while some contain steroids.

Your doctor can help you understand how each drug can help, and what the side effects are. A daily maintenance medication can make a big difference and reduce the need for a rescue inhaler.
Take your maintenance medicine every day, even on days when your symptoms feel under control.

It is important to take your maintenance medicine every day, even on days when your symptoms feel under control.

Talk with your doctor to see if a daily maintenance medicine makes sense for your COPD. Next time you visit your doctor, ask:

*What can I expect if I stop smoking?*

*Can I add a maintenance medicine to my current treatment?*
Am I taking my COPD medicines the right way?

Are there any changes I can make to help my condition?

What medicines should I be taking every day?

**COPD TIP:** Could a maintenance treatment help your COPD? Only your doctor can tell you. Make an appointment today and find out.
There are many ways to live your life with COPD.

It starts by making some changes to your lifestyle. Just remember, keep a positive attitude, stay proactive on what you need to do to control your symptoms, and, most importantly, embrace your doctor as your partner.

If you haven’t asked your doctor about adding a maintenance medicine to your current treatment plan, maybe it’s time you did.
COPD Resources

The best thing you can do is to stay informed. To the right are several resources that may provide tips, information, and guidance as you or a loved one live with COPD.

COPD Foundation
copdfoundation.org

American Lung Association
lung.org

Caregiver Action Network
caregiveraction.org

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