



# Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

COPD is a serious lung disease that over time makes it hard to breathe. You may also have heard COPD called by other names, like emphysema or chronic bronchitis. People with COPD have difficulty exhaling air from their lungs, causing shortness of breath and tiredness.



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## What can YOU do to manage your condition?

There are many ways that you and your healthcare provider can work together to manage your symptoms and improve your quality of life.

### Quit smoking

Quitting smoking can slow the decline in lung function. It's never too late to quit.

**This is the single most effective way to slow the progression of your illness: Ask your provider for options to help. Call 1-800-QUIT NOW.**

### Talk to your doctor about non-drug treatments for COPD

- ✓ Vaccines against flu and pneumonia
- ✓ Exercise
- ✓ Pulmonary rehabilitation
- ✓ Good nutrition

### Follow treatment advice

Take your medicines as directed. Speak with your health care provider if you have any questions about when you should take them or if you need help using your inhalers.

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**Visit [AlosaHealth.org/COPD](https://www.AlosaHealth.org/COPD)**  
for patient resources and more detailed information

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## What causes COPD?

Cigarette smoking is the most common cause of COPD. Exposure to air pollution and dust or fumes can also cause COPD. It is important to reduce your exposure to these pollutants and try to stay indoors when the air quality is poor. Some patients develop COPD without a clear cause, but this is less common.

## Diagnosis of COPD

Early detection of COPD is important to get the most out of treatment. 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.

COPD usually gets worse over time, so it is important to work with your health care provider to manage your symptoms and help you stay as active as possible.

## Sudden worsening of COPD

A rapid worsening of your symptoms can sometimes occur. When this happens, it is much harder to catch your breath. It is very important to try and prevent these flare ups from happening. If your symptoms get suddenly worse, seek medical help immediately.

## Medicines for COPD

There are several different medications for COPD. Some COPD medicines should be taken every day, while others are only used when it is especially hard to breathe. Make sure you know when to take your medicines.

### Medicines used in COPD include:

- **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 prevent the airways from getting inflamed. They are usually given in an inhaler device and may also be given as a pill for a short time if your condition gets suddenly worse.
- **Antibiotics:** may be given if you have an infection.
- **Oxygen:** may be prescribed.

## Using your inhaler

Many kinds of inhalers are available. You may need to use more than one type. To get the most from your medicine and to avoid side effects, it is very important that you know how to use and maintain each inhaler device.

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

### Have a look at these helpful videos on how to use your inhaler:

[www.copdfoundation.org/Learn-More/For-Patients-Caregivers/Educational-Video-Series/Inhaler-Training-Videos.aspx](http://www.copdfoundation.org/Learn-More/For-Patients-Caregivers/Educational-Video-Series/Inhaler-Training-Videos.aspx)

### Exercise

Exercise can help you breathe more easily and may give you more energy. Aim for 20 minutes per day at first and increase gradually.

### Pulmonary rehabilitation

Your healthcare provider may recommend that you participate in pulmonary rehabilitation, or “rehab.”

This is a program that helps you learn to exercise and manage your disease with physical activity and counseling. It can help you stay active and carry out your day-to-day tasks.



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**These are general recommendations only; specific clinical decisions should be made by the treating physician based on an individual patient's clinical condition.**

[AlosaHealth.org](http://AlosaHealth.org)



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