

What is Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)?

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, is a combination of ongoing conditions that affect your lungs and breathing. These conditions can include chronic bronchitis and emphysema.
- COPD can be prevented and treated. It can be recognized by its key characteristic: difficulty breathing, especially when breathing out. However, if you have COPD, you may have other symptoms.

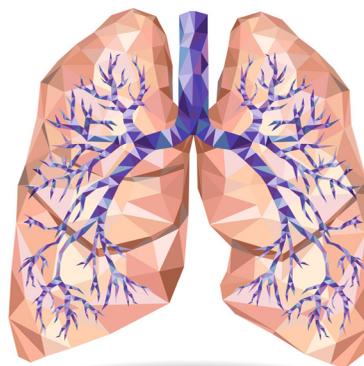
Did you know?

- **Veterans are at higher risk of COPD than those in the general US population.**
- Because some of their activities may pose a risk of environmental and occupational exposure, people in the military should be aware of COPD and know the signs that a person may have it.
- The physical activity associated with military life may uncover symptoms of COPD earlier among people in the armed forces. Patients in the military or veterans may show signs of COPD earlier in their lives than their civilian counterparts.



About the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for Management of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

This patient education resource supports the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for Management of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) (2014).



For additional COPD information, visit:

- <https://www.healthquality.va.gov>
- <https://QMO.amedd.army.mil>

Using a QR Code reader on your smartphone or mobile device, scan this code to read the Patient Summary of the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline Management of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (2014).



COPD



Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease



What Causes COPD?

People get COPD for different reasons. Often, people with COPD have been exposed to substances that irritate the lungs for long periods of time. They may smoke tobacco or may have smoked tobacco in the past. They could also be exposed to substances that irritate their lungs as part of their work or home environment. This can cause portions of the lungs to stop functioning as they should.

How is COPD Diagnosed?

Your provider (which may be a doctor, physician assistant, nurse practitioner, or other health care provider) can help you determine whether or not you have COPD. If your provider suspects you may have COPD, he or she can arrange for a simple breathing test in order to determine whether you do or do not have the disease.



What are the Goals of COPD Treatment?

Prevent COPD from progressing

- **Improve symptoms:**
 - Breathing
 - Exercise tolerance
 - Quality of life
- **Treat and prevent:**
 - Exacerbations (when symptoms suddenly worsen)
 - Complications

What are the Options for COPD Treatment?

There are multiple treatment options for COPD that can help you reach the previously listed goals. By consulting with a provider, you can learn more about the available treatment options and how they can help you.

Work with your provider to identify treatments that improve your symptoms and your health. The following treatment options are things that your provider may ask you to do at home or to make a part of your normal routine:

- Medication
- Oxygen Therapy
- Supported self-management
- Telehealth
- Breathing exercises
- Nutrition referral
- Surgery

Medication

Your provider may prescribe medication that you breathe in, so it goes straight to your lungs. The medication can help you keep your symptoms from worsening or help manage your COPD. With minimal practice and instruction, these medications can be easy to use. You should ask for help and work with your provider to make sure that you are taking it correctly and as directed.

What Should You Do If Your COPD Worsens?

If you are experiencing an exacerbation, which is a sudden worsening in your ability to breathe, an increase in your coughing, or a change in the color of your mucus, you should seek help immediately from the clinic or emergency department. Follow the steps in your action plan, if your provider has given you one.

What Else Can You Do to Improve Your Health?

- Quit smoking
- Avoid secondhand smoke
- Breathe clean air
- Eat right
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Get enough rest
- Stay positive; reduce stress
- Get a flu shot annually
- Get vaccinated against pneumonia

You Can Find More Information on COPD and Living with COPD Here:

National Heart Lung and Blood Institute:
www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/copd
(301) 592-8573

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
www.cdc.gov/copd
(800) 232-4636

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