

# 5 Must-Know Facts About COPD

*Seek treatment for COPD to lessen symptoms, slow the disease's progress, and improve your quality of life.*

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, affects more than 12 million Americans, according to the American Lung Association. Another 12 million may be undiagnosed with this disease, which includes both emphysema and chronic bronchitis. Getting treatment is crucial to managing the disease's symptoms. Here are five facts to keep top of mind when it comes to COPD.

## 1. COPD is the third leading cause of death in the United States.

COPD is a term used to describe conditions in which the air flowing in and out of the lungs is less than it should be. Often a person with COPD will have both emphysema and chronic bronchitis. The single leading cause of COPD is smoking. Those most at risk for developing the disease are smokers over age 40.

- Emphysema occurs when the walls of the lung's air sacs are broken down. The air spaces then get larger and air gets trapped, causing shortness of breath.
- Chronic bronchitis is the inflammation of the lining of the breathing tubes. The swollen tubes then produce mucus that gets coughed up.

## 2. COPD can be detected early.

Signs and symptoms of COPD include:

- Shortness of breath
- An ongoing cough (sometimes called a "smoker's cough")
- Mucus coming up with your cough
- Wheezing
- Limited exercise tolerance

Symptoms usually worsen over time. But while COPD lung damage is irreversible, early detection can help slow the progress of the disease.

Your doctor will diagnose COPD based on your signs and symptoms, your medical and family history, and test results.

Tests may include:

- Lung function tests
- Chest X-ray
- Arterial blood gas test (in which the blood's oxygen level is measured)

## 3. You can feel better with proper treatment of COPD.

COPD has no cure yet. But treatments and changes in lifestyle can lead to easier breathing, becoming more active, and avoiding or managing symptoms.

Treatments for COPD include:

- Medicines
- Vaccines
- Pulmonary rehabilitation
- Oxygen therapy
- Surgery, in rare and more serious cases

If you are a smoker, the most important step in lessening the symptoms of COPD is to quit smoking. Talk to your doctor about getting help quitting.

## 4. You can prevent COPD.

Cigarette smoking is the number one cause of COPD. The best way to prevent the disease is to not smoke or to quit smoking. Other things you can do to prevent COPD include avoiding lung irritants such as:

- Secondhand smoke
- Air pollution
- Chemical fumes
- Dust

## 5. You can get help for COPD.

Remember, early detection is a key factor in preventing further damage to the lungs and managing this life-threatening disease. If you have any of the signs and symptoms of COPD listed above, talk to your doctor or contact your HealthSpan Personal Nurse Coach.