

fact sheet



*"When you can't breathe...
nothing else matters"*[®]

What is COPD?

- COPD is a medical term that stands for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease.
 - The word 'Chronic' means it won't go away
 - The word 'Obstructive' means limiting airflow
 - The word 'Pulmonary' means in the lungs
 - The word 'Disease' means an illness
- Many people with COPD have a combination of emphysema, chronic bronchitis and asthma.
- You may also hear COPD referred to as COAD (Chronic Obstructive Airways Disease), COLD (Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease) or CAL (Chronic Airways Limitation).
- COPD cannot be cured or reversed, but it can be treated.

Who can get COPD?

- Smokers or past smokers are at risk of getting COPD.
- Some people with COPD worked or lived in places that were very dusty or smoky for many years.
- COPD cannot be caught from someone else, but is sometimes inherited. One inherited genetic disorder is called alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency. This causes COPD to begin much earlier than usual; a separate information brochure is available from Lung Foundation Australia.

What are the symptoms?

- Getting out of breath more easily than others your age when doing things like climbing stairs, walking up a hill or even having a shower.
- A new, persistent or changed cough.
- A build-up in the lungs of a sticky substance called phlegm which you swallow or cough-up.
- Symptoms of COPD often don't show up until after the age of 35.

What causes shortness of breath?

- *The air passages in the lungs are damaged.*
Air flows in and out of your lungs through thousands of small air passages called bronchial tubes. When you have COPD, these tubes become narrower, making it harder to breathe. Medicine can help your tubes to work better, opening them up and making breathing easier.



A normal tube



COPD causes tubes to narrow



Medicine can help tubes work better

- ***Breathing muscles do not work well***

With COPD, your lungs become larger than normal, so the breathing muscles around the outside of the lungs (e.g. the diaphragm and chest wall muscles) become stretched and have to work harder. This means that there is more effort involved in breathing and it makes you feel breathless. These muscles help you take deep breaths to get plenty of oxygen. With COPD you can only take smaller breaths.

- ***Arm & leg muscles tire***

The muscles in your arms and legs tire easily and this may make your shortness of breath worse.

How does a doctor test for COPD?

- COPD is tested with a simple breathing test (called spirometry).
- You blow into a small machine called a spirometer.
- The results of the test tell the doctor whether you have COPD and how bad it is.
- The test helps distinguish COPD from asthma.

The facts: Australia

- Almost 1 in 7 people 40 years and older have airflow limitation.
- More people are dying from COPD each year.
- COPD is preventable and treatable.

The good news

- The good news is that by following the steps below, you can reduce ALL your symptoms and slow down the damage being done to your lungs.

Step 1. Stop smoking

- This is the single most important thing you can do to help yourself. Most people need help to quit.
- The sooner you stop smoking the longer you are likely to live – it is that simple.
- Keep smoking and your health will get worse far quicker than if you quit.

Step 2. Seek help from health professionals

- Talk with your health professional (doctor, nurse, physiotherapist, pharmacist etc.) to understand how COPD is affecting you and what you can do about it.
- If you are, or were a smoker, do not hide this from your doctor.
- Learn how your medicines work and then take them correctly.
- Make a plan with your doctor so you know what to do if your COPD gets worse suddenly.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions.

Step 3. Boost your health

- Join an exercise and education program, often called pulmonary rehabilitation. This is one of the best treatments for COPD. Lung Foundation Australia can help you find the program nearest to you.
- Exercise should be safe, enjoyable and regular. Walking is an excellent exercise. You should check with your health professional about a suitable exercise plan.
- Lung Foundation Australia's Lungs in Action program is a fun and safe community based exercise class for those who have recently completed pulmonary rehabilitation. You can find your nearest program by calling the Lung Foundation on 1800 654 301 or visiting the website, www.lungsinaction.com.au.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight or underweight can place a strain on your body. A healthy weight plus a healthy diet will help you to stay stronger and have more energy.

Step 4. Protect against flare-ups (exacerbations)

- Because you have COPD, you may be more likely to get chest infections. Protect yourself by:
 - Having annual flu immunisation and pneumococcal immunisation as required.
 - Acting quickly if your symptoms are worse. Check the plan you made with your doctor so you know exactly what to do and what medicines to take.

Step 5. Join a support group

- Lung Foundation Australia supports a network of Patient Support Groups across Australia. Patient support is all about assisting you to manage your condition more effectively by gaining a better understanding of it; meeting people who are going through a similar experience and helping you feel that you are not alone.

Working with your health professional

- Find a team of health professionals you like and are happy to work with on a regular basis. The more they know about you and your symptoms, the better job they can do working with you to manage your COPD.
- Ask your health professional to prepare a plan of the things you can do to control your COPD and make your breathing easier. Their plan may follow this structure:

C	Confirm diagnosis Test to see if you have COPD
O	Optimise function Ways to help make breathing easier including attending a pulmonary rehabilitation program
P	Prevent deterioration Doing everything possible to stop you getting worse
D	DEVELOP SUPPORT NETWORK AND SELF MANAGEMENT A plan for managing your COPD
X	Manage eXacerbations (FLARE UPS) What to do if you get worse suddenly

- It is important to visit your health professional for regular check-ups, or if your symptoms change.

Take action today

- COPD is a serious disease that can have a big impact on the quality of your life. However, if you follow the 5 steps outlined in this brochure, it is possible to reduce your symptoms and slow down the damage to your lungs.
- Don't let your breathing get any worse. If you are a smoker, decide today to stop and take control of your COPD.

Further information

Further detailed information on COPD is available:

- Save your Breath: Information for people recently diagnosed with COPD
- Better Living with COPD: A Patient Guide
- Getting Started on Home Oxygen

To order copies, phone 1800 654 301.

Here to help

Lung Foundation Australia's Information and Support Centre can help you to find out more about COPD and the help that is available to you. Contact us by:

- Phoning 1800 654 301 free-call
- Emailing enquiries@lungfoundation.com.au
- Logging onto www.lungfoundation.com.au

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