CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a progressive lung disease characterised by airflow limitation that isn’t fully reversible. It is the umbrella term for a range of lung diseases including emphysema, chronic bronchitis and chronic asthma.

CAUSES

COPD can affect males and females of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. Causes can include:

- Tobacco smoking
- Passive smoking
- Exposure to occupational or environmental pollutants (dust, gas or fumes)

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms for COPD tend to come on gradually over a couple of years and people who unknowingly have COPD may mistake their symptoms as signs of ageing, lack of fitness or asthma.

- Shortness of breath
- A repetitive cough
- Phlegm or mucus

DIAGNOSIS

A spirometry test is needed to confirm the diagnosis of COPD.

TREATMENT

While COPD currently has no cure, there are things that people can do to be more active, breathe more easily, keep out of hospital and improve their quality of life. These include:

- Pulmonary rehabilitation
  - An exercise program that reduces breathlessness, fatigue, anxiety and depression
- Inhaled medicines
  - Reduces symptoms and prevents exacerbations associated with hospital admissions
- Regular vaccinations
  - Against influenza and pneumococcal infection
- Stop smoking
  - Slows the rate the disease progresses and improves symptoms
- Oxygen therapy
  - For people with advanced COPD who are unable to absorb sufficient oxygen to supply their vital organs

SUPPORT

As COPD is a chronic condition, it is important that people take an active role in managing their condition. There are a range of treatment options, resources and support services available to help you live well with COPD. Contact Lung Foundation Australia for more information.