

# 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.

**1 in 7**       

Australians over the age of 40 has COPD.<sup>i</sup>



COPD is the **second leading cause** of avoidable hospital admissions.<sup>ii</sup>



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have approximately **2.5 times the rate of COPD as other Australians.**<sup>iii</sup>



Exacerbations or flare-ups of symptoms can occur in people with COPD. Frequent exacerbations of COPD can cause poor quality of life and a rapid decline in lung function.<sup>iv</sup>

## 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<sup>v</sup>. These include:



**Pulmonary rehabilitation**

An exercise program that reduces breathlessness, fatigue, anxiety and depression<sup>v</sup>



**Inhaled medicines**

Reduces symptoms and prevents exacerbations associated with hospital admissions.<sup>v</sup>



**Regular vaccinations**

Against influenza and pneumococcal infection.<sup>v</sup>



**Stop smoking**

Slows the rate the disease progresses and improves symptoms.<sup>v,vi</sup>



**Oxygen therapy**

For people with advanced COPD who are unable to absorb sufficient oxygen to supply their vital organs.<sup>v</sup>

## 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.

<sup>i</sup> Toelle B, Xuan W, Bird T, Abramson M, Atkinson D, Burton D, James A, Jenkins C, Johns D, Maguire G, Musk A, Walters E, Wood-Baker R, Hunter M, Graham B, Southwell P, Vollmer W, Buist A, Marks G. Respiratory symptoms and illness in older Australians: The Burden of Obstructive Lung Disease (BOLD) study. Med J Aust 2013;198:144-148

<sup>ii</sup> National Health Performance Authority 2015, Health Communities: Potentially preventable hospitalisations in 2013-14.

<sup>iii</sup> Australian Institute of Health And Welfare. Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Canberra, AIHW, 2015.

<sup>iv</sup> Wedzicha, J A and Seemungal, T A. COPD Exacerbations: defining their cause and prevention. Lancet. 2007, Vol. 370, pp. 786-796.

<sup>v</sup> McKenzie DK, Frith PA, Burdon et al on behalf of The Australian Lung Foundation. The COPDX Plan: Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for the Management of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease 2014, found at [www.copdx.org.au](http://www.copdx.org.au)

<sup>vi</sup> Fletcher C, Peto R. The natural history of chronic airflow obstruction. B Med J 1977;1:1645-1648

**IF YOU EXPERIENCE ANY SYMPTOMS SPEAK TO YOUR DOCTOR.**

FIND OUT MORE  
[lungfoundation.com.au](http://lungfoundation.com.au)  
or phone 1800 654 301.



**Lung Foundation Australia**

when you can't breathe... nothing else matters<sup>®</sup>