

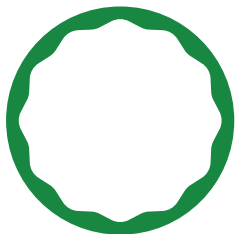
What is COPD?

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is the name for a group of lung conditions which include:

- Emphysema
- Chronic bronchitis
- Chronic asthma.

When you have COPD your airways are narrowed, swollen or blocked with mucus. Sometimes, lung tissue may also be damaged. This makes it harder to move air in and out of your lungs as you breathe.

Below is an example of how COPD impacts the airways.



Healthy airways



Airways with COPD
Swollen, narrower and with more phlegm (mucus)

What are the symptoms?



Shortness of breath



A cough that doesn't get better



Coughing up mucus or phlegm



Wheezing (a whistling sound when you breathe)



Getting chest infections more often and taking longer to get better



Feeling tired

What causes COPD?

There are many things that can increase the chance of COPD:

- Smoking, including if you have smoked in the past
- Passive smoking (breathing in second-hand smoke from other people smoking)
- Breathing in hazardous fumes, dusts or gases at work. Talk to your doctor about the kinds of work you do now and the jobs you've done in the past. This helps them keep a better check on your lung health
- Air pollution
- Lung problems in childhood, early (premature) birth, low birth weight
- A genetic condition called alpha-1-antitrypsin deficiency.

COPD flare-ups

A flare-up is when your COPD symptoms suddenly get worse. It's also called an exacerbation.

Signs of a flare-up include:

- Feeling more breathless than normal
- Coughing more than normal
- More mucus than normal
- Mucus changes colour or taste, or gets thicker.

Make a COPD Action Plan with your doctor to help you spot the signs of a flare-up and know what to do. You may be able to manage a flare-up with medicine and rest at home. Your Action Plan will help you know when to call your doctor or go to the hospital for emergency care.

Things you can do

There's no cure for COPD but there are many things that you can do to live as well as possible:



If you smoke, quit smoking

Quitting smoking is the best thing you can do for your lungs. The best chance of quitting is with support and stop-smoking medicine, including nicotine replacement therapy. Call Quitline 13 7848 (quit.org.au) or ask your GP, nurse or pharmacist for help with quitting.



Ask your doctor to complete a written COPD Action Plan with you

A COPD Action Plan helps you manage your COPD and spot the signs of a flare-up. It includes what medicines and treatments you need, and when you should get help. Download a COPD Action Plan at lungfoundation.com.au/COPDActionPlan.



Do pulmonary rehabilitation

This is an exercise and education program led by health professionals. You will learn about your COPD and how to exercise safely. Ask your doctor to refer you to a pulmonary rehabilitation program near you.



Know when to use your COPD medicines

Medicines can open your airways or reduce the swelling inside them. Together, you and your doctor will decide which medicines you should use. For each medicine, ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist to explain what it does and when to use it.



Use your inhalers (medicines you breathe in) the correct way

Inhalers can get the right amount of medicine to where it needs to be in your lungs, but only when used correctly. Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist to check how you use your inhaler at least once a year.



Get vaccinated

This can help protect you from getting very sick from illnesses like influenza (the flu), pneumococcal and COVID-19. Vaccinations can also lower the chance of a flare-up. Ask your doctor or nurse if you are up to date with vaccinations that protect you from respiratory illnesses.



Be active for 30 minutes most days of the week

Regular exercise that makes you breathe harder than normal but still able to talk is good for your lungs. If you need help getting started, ask your doctor to refer you to a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist for an exercise program that's right for you.



Learn how to cope with feeling breathless

Feeling out of breath is scary. But it's important to remember that breathlessness is not doing you harm, and it will pass. Using breathing techniques, resting positions, a hand held fan to blow cool air on your face, and positive thoughts like, 'I know this will go away soon' can be helpful. Ask your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist about ways you can manage breathlessness.



Eat well and keep to a healthy weight

When you have COPD, you use more energy to breathe and do your daily activities. A well-balanced diet can help you stay strong and healthy. If you are finding it hard to eat enough to keep a healthy weight, ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian.



Look after your mental health

It is normal to feel anxious, depressed or overwhelmed when you have COPD. If these feelings are affecting your life, support is available. Ask your doctor who can provide options for treatment and refer you to a mental health professional.



ACCESS ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Our Respiratory Care Nurse service provides free telephone support and information to people living with COPD, occupational lung disease or bronchiectasis. To book an appointment, contact our Information and Support Centre on free call 1800 654 301 or visit our website to book an appointment online.

Please note that this is an English language service.

Lungfoundation.com.au | Freecall 1800 654 301 | enquiries@lungfoundation.com.au

Note to reader: This information is intended as a general guide only and is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice or treatment. While all care is taken to ensure accuracy at the time of publication, Lung Foundation Australia and its members exclude all liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by use of or reliance on the information provided. Always consult with your doctor about matters that affect your health.