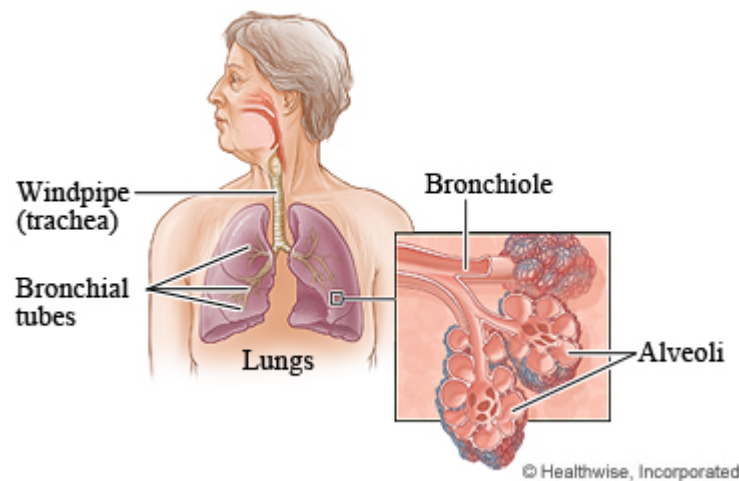


# Learning About COPD



## What is COPD?

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COPD is a lung disease that makes it hard to breathe. COPD stands for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It is caused by damage to the lungs over many years, usually from smoking. COPD is a mix of two diseases: chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

Other things that may put you at risk for COPD include breathing chemical fumes, dust, or air pollution over a long period of time. Secondhand smoke is also bad.

In chronic bronchitis, the airways that carry air to the lungs (bronchial tubes) get inflamed and make a lot of mucus. This can narrow or block the airways, making it hard for you to breathe. In emphysema, the air sacs in your lungs are damaged and lose their stretch. Less air gets in and out of your lungs, which makes you feel short of breath.

## What can you expect when you have COPD?

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COPD gets worse over time. You cannot undo the damage to your lungs.

Over time, you may find that:

- You get short of breath even when you do simple things like get dressed or fix a meal.
- It is hard to eat or exercise.
- You lose weight and feel weaker.

But there are things you can do to prevent more damage and feel better.

## What are the symptoms?

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The main symptoms are:

- A cough that will not go away.
- Mucus that comes up when you cough.
- Shortness of breath that gets worse with activity.

At times, your symptoms may suddenly flare up and get much worse. This is called a COPD exacerbation (say "egg-ZASS-er-BAY-shun"). When this happens, your usual symptoms quickly get worse and stay bad. This can be dangerous. You may have to go to the hospital.

## How can you keep COPD from getting worse?

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**Don't smoke.** That is the best way to keep COPD from getting worse. If you already smoke, it is never too late to stop. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.

You can do other things to keep COPD from getting worse:

- **Avoid bad air.** Air pollution, chemical fumes, and dust also can make COPD worse.
- **Get a flu shot every year.** A shot may keep the flu from turning into something more serious, like pneumonia. A flu shot also may lower your chances of having a COPD flare-up.
- **Get a pneumococcal vaccine shot.** If you have had one before, ask your doctor if you need another dose.

## How is COPD treated?

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COPD is treated with medicines and oxygen. You also can take steps at home to stay healthy and keep your COPD from getting worse.

### Medicines and oxygen therapy

- You may be taking medicines such as:
  - **Bronchodilators.** These help open your airways and make breathing easier. Bronchodilators are either short-acting (work for 6 to 9 hours) or long-acting (work for 24 hours). You inhale most bronchodilators, so they start to act quickly. Always carry your quick-relief inhaler with you in case you need it while you are away from home.
  - **Corticosteroids.** These reduce airway inflammation. They come in pill or inhaled form. You must take these medicines every day for them to work well.
- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- Oxygen therapy boosts the amount of oxygen in your blood and helps you breathe easier. Use the flow rate your doctor has recommended, and do not change it without talking to your doctor first.

### Other care at home

- If your doctor recommends it, get more exercise. Walking is a good choice. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk every day. Try for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- Learn breathing methods—such as breathing through pursed lips—to help you become less short of breath.

- If your doctor has not set you up with a pulmonary rehabilitation program, talk to him or her about whether rehab is right for you. Rehab includes exercise programs, education about your disease and how to manage it, help with diet and other changes, and emotional support.
- Eat regular, healthy meals. Use bronchodilators about 1 hour before you eat to make it easier to eat. Eat several small meals instead of three large ones. Drink beverages at the end of the meal. Avoid foods that are hard to chew.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## Where can you learn more?

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Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/patiented>

Enter **V314** in the search box to learn more about "**Learning About COPD**".

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