

# CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE



One of the most common diseases affecting the lungs, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is characterized by a persistent difficulty in air flow that alters the normal breathing process. It's a chronic condition, and can cause complications if not treated properly.

## There are two main forms

- Chronic bronchitis, which involves a prolonged cough with mucus.
- Emphysema, which involves damage to the lungs over time.

**Most of those who have it suffer from both conditions.**

## Risk Factors

- Smoking
- On-the-job exposure to certain gases and chemicals (vapors, irritants and gases)
- Exposure to considerable amounts of contaminants or indirect cigarette smoke
- Improper ventilation when frequently cooking with fire
- Repeated lower respiratory tract infections during childhood
- Inheritance

## Symptoms

The most common symptoms are shortness of breath, the abnormal coughing up of mucus, and chronic coughing. As the disease gets worse, everyday activities can become more difficult.

**The following symptoms may also occur:**

- Coughing (with or without phlegm)
- Difficulty breathing (dyspnea) that worsens with mild activity
- Fatigue
- Difficulty inhaling
- Multiple respiratory infections
- Wheezing or gasping

## Diagnosis

### Lung Exams

Through a pulmonary function test called spirometry, which consists of blowing as hard as you can into a small machine that evaluates lung capacity. The results can be analyzed immediately. These tests are essential for diagnosis.

### Imaging

Lung X-rays may be helpful, but sometimes they look normal, even when a person has COPD and a chest X-ray is taken.

## Treatment

- If you are a smoker, you can reduce the damage if you quit smoking.
- Take your medications as directed by your doctor.  
These may include inhalers, steroids, anti-inflammatory drugs, antibiotics, among others.
- Use a machine to help you to breath.

### Follow these recommendations to perform your daily activities more easily:

- Perform light physical activities to increase your strength. Ask your doctor which physical activity is right for you.
- If you have difficulty breathing, try not to talk when walking.
- Avoid inhaling very cold air.

### References:

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. U.S. National Library of Medicine  
<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000091.htm>

Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease. Global strategy for prevention, diagnosis, and management of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; 2022. Available from: <https://goldcopd.org>

**Call your doctor immediately if your symptoms get worse.**

**If for any reason your primary care physician is not available, you may obtain assistance by calling:**

**MCS medilíneaMD • 1.833.275.6276**  
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