**CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD)**

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a chronic disease that is often preventable and treatable. If you or a loved one has COPD, there are steps to take to cope with the lifestyle changes this disease brings. Learning about COPD and its treatment can help you feel more in control.

**Key Points**

1. COPD is chronic. In other words, you live with it every day.
2. It can cause serious long-term disability and early death.
3. There is no cure for COPD, but it is often preventable and treatable.
4. COPD is referred to as chronic bronchitis or emphysema.

**What Is COPD?**

With COPD, the airways in your lungs become inflamed and thicken, and the tissue where oxygen is exchanged is destroyed. The flow of air in and out of your lungs decreases. When that happens, less oxygen gets into your body tissues, and it becomes harder to get rid of the waste gas carbon dioxide. As the disease gets worse, shortness of breath makes it harder to remain active.

Sometimes referred to as either chronic bronchitis or emphysema, most people will have symptoms of both conditions, so health professionals prefer to call the disease COPD. However, some doctors think that chronic bronchitis may be present even though a person does not have the airway obstruction characteristic of COPD. Your doctor can explain your condition and the best way to treat it.

It is important to remember that in many cases, COPD can be [prevented](https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/what-causes-copd) and can be [treated](https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/treating).

**How Serious Is COPD?**

COPD is the third leading cause of death by disease in the United States. More than 16.4 million people have been diagnosed with COPD, but millions more may have the disease without even knowing it. COPD causes serious long-term disability and early death. At this time there is no cure, and the number of people dying from COPD is growing.

**COPD in Women**

Deaths resulting from COPD in women are higher than in men. There are a few reasons why this happens.

* In the late 1960s, the tobacco industry intensely targeted women. This resulted in a huge increase in women smoking. We are still seeing new cases of smoking related diseases, including COPD, as women age.
* Women are more vulnerable than men to lung damage from cigarette smoke and other pollutants. Their lungs are smaller and estrogen may play a role in worsening lung disease.
* Women are often misdiagnosed. Because COPD has long been thought of as a man’s disease, many doctors still do not expect to see it in women and miss the proper diagnosis.

**Missing the Warning Signs**

COPD is often not found until the disease is very advanced because people do not [know the early warning signs](https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/what-causes-copd). Sometimes people think they are short of breath or less able to take part in their normal activities because they are "just getting older."

**It Can Be Treated**

There's no cure for COPD, but the good news is that it can be found early. Much can be done to treat and help manage the disease. Through medications, oxygen therapy, pulmonary rehabilitation and social support, many people are able to live with their disease for many years

<https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/learn-about-copd>