



COPD

PATIENT SUPPORT

What is COPD?

This piece has been reviewed by COPD Support Ireland.



COPD
Support Ireland



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COPD & Me

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a very common lung disease. If you have been diagnosed with COPD, this leaflet will help answer your questions and give you a better understanding of:

- **COPD**
- **Causes**
- **Symptoms**
- **Diagnosis**
- **Treatments**

What is COPD?

COPD is a lung disease that makes it difficult to breathe. To understand what causes this, it's important to know about the 2 diseases that make up COPD:

- **Chronic bronchitis**
- **Emphysema**

Chronic bronchitis

Inside your lungs are airways that carry air in and out of the body. With chronic bronchitis, airways become swollen (inflamed). Over time this can lead to scarring and narrowing in the airways. The scarred, narrow airways produce extra mucus. This makes it harder to inhale and exhale and can leave you short of breath.



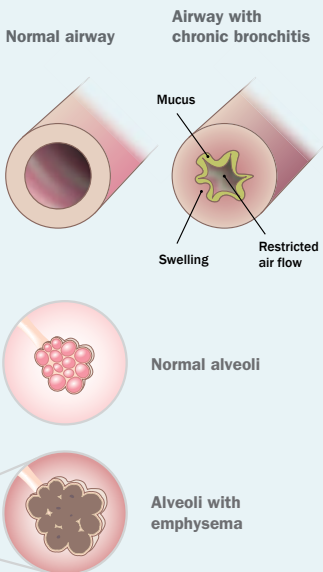
There are more than 600 million people with COPD worldwide

Emphysema

Emphysema affects the small air sacs, or alveoli, at the end of airways. Air sacs are where inhaled oxygen gets into the bloodstream. It is also where carbon dioxide leaves the bloodstream to be exhaled. With emphysema, the air sacs are damaged or destroyed and cannot be repaired. With fewer air sacs around, less inhaled oxygen can reach the bloodstream.

Emphysema causes the lungs to lose their springiness. When that happens, air cannot get out of the lungs and becomes trapped. The lungs are not emptied when you exhale. This eventually causes the lungs to expand too much (hyperinflation). A good way to think of this is like blowing air into a balloon that is already filled.

The effects of both forms of COPD make it harder to inhale and exhale, leaving you short of breath.



If you have any of the COPD symptoms mentioned in this brochure, talk with your doctor about a treatment plan that will work for you.

What causes COPD?

There are many things that can lead to COPD. **The most common cause is smoking cigarettes.** Some other causes of COPD are:

- Air pollution
- Harsh chemical dusts and gases
- Genetics

What are the symptoms of COPD?

The symptoms of COPD may include:

- Breathlessness
- Constant cough
- Coughing up mucus
- Wheezing
- Chest tightness
- Fatigue
- Exacerbations

What are exacerbations?

Some people with COPD may experience episodes where symptoms get much worse. These episodes are called exacerbations. There is a greater sense of breathlessness, more coughing, and more mucus. This is usually caused by an infection or inhaling some pollution. Sometimes the cause of an exacerbation is not found.

Always let your doctor know when your symptoms suddenly become worse so you can get the right treatment.

How is COPD diagnosed?

To diagnose COPD, doctors ask many questions about symptoms and patient history. They also do a full physical examination. Sometimes doctors will give you a special breathing test called spirometry. This test is done by having you breathe through a tube connected to a machine called a spirometer. Spirometry is the best test to diagnose COPD. It also can be used to determine the stage of COPD. Spirometry also helps to rule out diseases with similar symptoms, like asthma.



! *The stage of COPD depends on lung function. There are 4 stages of COPD: mild, moderate, severe, and very severe.*

How is lung function measured?

Spirometry is a test that measures how well lungs are working, or “lung function.” Lung function is measured by an FEV₁ score. FEV₁ stands for Forced Expiratory Volume in 1 second. This is the total amount of air a person can exhale in one second. Doctors compare FEV₁ results to a record of healthy scores to determine the stage of COPD.

How is COPD treated?

COPD is treatable. The first step in controlling COPD is to quit smoking and getting routine vaccinations such as those for influenza and pneumonia. There are different kinds of medications for treating COPD. The most common medications are bronchodilators and inhaled steroids.

Many patients with COPD also benefit from pulmonary rehabilitation programs. These programs include:

- **Exercise training**
- **Advice on healthy eating**
- **COPD education**

Ask your doctor if this type of program is right for you.

Bronchodilators are central to managing symptoms of COPD. Bronchodilators are inhaled medications that help to open airways. They are the basis for ongoing therapy and controlling symptoms of COPD.

For people with COPD, bronchodilators may improve:

- **Lung function**
- **General well-being**
- **Ability to exercise**
- **Exacerbation rates**

If COPD worsens, doctors may combine different types of medications. Treatment with inhaled steroids is for patients with more severe stages of COPD and/or frequent exacerbations. Regular treatment with inhaled steroids may:

- **Reduce exacerbations**
- **Improve health status**

COPD is a common and treatable disease. Talk with your doctor about which treatment will work best for you and your COPD.

For help to quit smoking call the National Smokers' Qitline on 1850 201 203 or visit www.quit.ie



A number of Patient Support Groups open to anyone living with COPD are in place nationwide including Dublin, Bray, Louth, Clare, Sligo, Mayo, Cork & Waterford.

Please contact COPD Support Ireland for further information on group meetings & services available in your area.

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