



COPD

COPD, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, is a progressive disease that makes it hard to breathe. “Progressive” means the disease gets worse over time.

COPD is a major cause of disability and is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States.

SYMPTOMS

COPD can cause coughing that produces large amounts of mucus, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness, and other symptoms.

COPD develops slowly. Symptoms often worsen over time and can limit your ability to do routine activities. Severe COPD may prevent you from doing even basic activities like walking, cooking, or taking care of yourself.

COPD is diagnosed in the middle-aged or older population. COPD is not passed from person to person – you cannot catch it from someone else

Risk Factors

Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of COPD. Most people who have COPD smoke or used to smoke. Long-term exposure to other lung irritants, such as air pollution, chemical fumes, or dust, may contribute to COPD. Asthma, may be a contributing factor.

The air you breathe goes down your windpipe into tubes in your lungs called bronchial tubes.

The airways are shaped like an upside-down tree with many branches. At the end of the branches are tiny air sacs called alveoli.

The airway and air sacs are elastic. When you breathe in, each air sac fills up with air, like a small balloon. When you breathe out, the air sac deflates and the air goes out.

In COPD, less air flows in and out of the airways because of one or more of the following:

- **The airways and air sacs lose their elastic quality**
- **The walls between many of the air sacs are destroyed**
- **The walls of the airways become thick, inflamed and swollen**
- **The airways make more mucus than usual, which tends to clog the airways**

COPD includes two (2) main conditions:

1. Emphysema

The walls between many of the air sacs are damaged, causing them to lose their shape and become floppy. This damage may cause fewer and larger air sacs instead of many tiny ones.

2. Chronic obstructive bronchitis

The lining of the airways is constantly irritated and inflamed. This causes the lining to thicken. Increased thick mucous forms in the airways, making it hard to breathe.

Although COPD has no cure yet, to reverse the damage to the airways and lungs, treatments and lifestyle changes can help you feel better, stay more active and slow the progress of the disease.