



"Excellence in Home Care"

# COPD Education

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## What is COPD?

**C**hronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is the overall term for a group of chronic lung conditions that obstruct the airways in your lungs. COPD usually refers to obstruction caused by chronic bronchitis and emphysema, but it can also refer to damage caused by asthmatic bronchitis. In all forms of COPD, there's a blockage within the tubes and air sacs that make up your lungs, which hinders your ability to exhale. When you can't properly exhale, air gets trapped in your lungs and makes it difficult for you to breathe normally.

In the majority of cases, COPD is caused by long-term smoking and could be prevented by not smoking or quitting smoking. Once the symptoms begin, however, the damage to your lungs can't be reversed, and there's no cure. Treatments for COPD focus primarily on controlling symptoms and preventing further damage.



Medicated inhalers are used for breathing problems like COPD and Asthma.

## What are the risk factors?

**Exposure to tobacco** smoke and long-term cigarette smoking are the most significant risk factors for acquiring COPD. The more years that you smoke and the more packs you smoke, the greater your risk for developing this disease. Pipe smokers, cigar smokers and people who are exposed to large amounts of second-hand smoke are also at risk.

**Long-term occupational exposure to dusts and chemicals** that can irritate and inflame your lungs is an additional risk factor.

**Your age** may also play a role in acquiring the disease. COPD develops slowly over years, so most people are at least 40 years old when

their symptoms first begin. **Your family history** or genetics can be a key factor in having risks for developing COPD. A rare genetic disorder known as alpha-2-antitrypsin deficiency is the source of some cases of COPD. Researchers suspect that some genetic factors may also make certain smokers more susceptible to the disease.

See "COPD Alert Zones" on the back page for managing this disease with the help of home health. The zones are broken into color designations for easy reference.

## What are the symptoms?

It is often silent initially and signs don't appear until significant lung damage has occurred. Once symptoms begin, they typically worsen over time.

### SYMPTOMS of COPD

- Persistent cough
- Increased mucous production
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Fatigue
- Frequent respiratory infections
- Weight Loss

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## Treatments for COPD

The best treatment for COPD is smoking cessation. Quitting smoking also reduces the risk for heart attack, sudden cardiac death, stroke, and lung cancer. Bronchodilators and inhaled corticosteroids may be beneficial for smokers and for nonsmokers. Home oxygen therapy could be prescribed to correct hypoxemia (low blood oxygen) to improve the physical and mental functioning of patients. Long-term survival in patients with severe COPD has been reported to increase for patients who received oxygen therapy.

Other treatment methods could include pulmonary rehabilitation whereby the patient is cared for by a team of specialists including pulmonary physicians, respiratory therapists, occupational therapists, and dieticians.

Bethany Home Health Services has trained nurses who work with patients to teach them about managing their disease and continuing their rehabilitation under their physicians' care.

## Bethany HomeHealth Can Help

Bethany HomeHealth nurses and therapists are the patients' partners in learning how to control and live with COPD. They:

- Assess and teach signs and symptoms of Bronchitis exacerbation and increases in cough and expectoration
- Monitor for edema and right sided heart failure
- Assess and teach the signs and symptoms of increased severity of emphysema
- Monitor the patient for shortness of breath, weight loss and decreased oxygen levels by Pulse Oximeter
- Assess and teach the proper use of inhalers
- Monitor Oxygen Saturations (O2 Sats) during exercise and if there are increased symptoms. A baseline reading is also taken.
- Draw and monitor lab tests ordered

If you or a loved one has been diagnosed with COPD, call us. We'll work with your physician to coordinate a care plan that is right for you—in the comfort of your home.

### Green Zone: All Clear

- No shortness of breath
- No coughing
- No chest pain
- No decrease in your ability to maintain activity
- No new symptoms
- Your symptoms are under control
- Continue taking your medications as ordered
- Continue avoiding environmental triggers and extremes
- Maintain good nutrition
- Keep all physician appointments

### Yellow Zone: Have Symptoms

- Increased cough & sputum
- Increase in shortness of breath with activity,
- Increase in pillows needed
- Wheezing

Call your home health nurse if you have these symptoms.

- Your symptoms may indicate that you need a quick relief medication
- You may need an adjustment of your medications.

### Red Zone Medical ALERT

- Unrelieved shortness of breath or shortness of breath at rest
- Unrelieved chest pain
- Wheezing or chest tightness at rest
- Need to sit in chair to sleep
- Confusion
- Slurring speech
- Excessive sleepiness

Call your physician immediately if you have these symptoms.

**If you are having a true emergency, call 9-1-1.**

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