A Patient’s Guide to Living With COPD

Understanding COPD and Taking Action to Feel Better

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What is COPD?

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a chronic lung disease that makes it hard to breathe
  - COPD develops over time
  - COPD causes shortness of breath, which can lead to fatigue

- COPD includes 2 diseases—chronic bronchitis and emphysema
  - Many people with COPD have both chronic bronchitis and emphysema
What is chronic bronchitis?

- With chronic bronchitis, the airways swell, become narrow, and make a lot of mucus
  - The lining of the airways is constantly irritated and thick
  - Less air is able to flow to and from the lungs
  - You may feel short of breath
What is emphysema?

- With emphysema, the walls of the air sacs in the lungs are damaged
  - The air sacs lose their shape and elastic quality
  - Pushing air out of the lungs is hard
  - Your lungs get less air, and you may feel short of breath
What causes COPD?

- Long-term exposure to
  - Tobacco smoke—first- or second-hand
  - Air pollution
  - Chemicals or fumes
  - Airborne dust

- In rare cases, the cause is a deficiency of a protein in your body (alpha-1 antitrypsin)
You are not alone

In the United States

- More than 12 million people have been diagnosed with COPD
  - Another 12 million people may have the disease and not even know it
- More than 3 million people have been diagnosed with emphysema
- More than 9 million people are diagnosed with chronic bronchitis
COPD is not asthma

- Asthma and COPD both cause breathing problems, but they are not the same
  - They are not treated the same way

- With asthma, the airways swell and become narrow in response to various triggers
  - Medicines may help reduce swelling and improve breathing

- With COPD, there is damage to the lungs that cannot be fixed
  - Medicines may help make breathing easier, but breathing does not return to normal
Stages of COPD

- **Mild**
  - Breathing test shows mild problem with air flow
  - You may have a cough that does not go away
  - You may have more mucus than normal

- **Moderate**
  - Breathing test shows problem with air flow that is getting worse
  - You may feel short of breath when you work hard or walk fast

- **Severe**
  - Breathing test shows serious problem with air flow
  - You are short of breath after being just a little active

- **Very Severe**
  - Breathing test shows serious problem with air flow
  - You are short of breath after being just a little active
  - You may develop chronic respiratory failure as a complication

Your healthcare provider will test your lung function (spirometry) to determine your stage of COPD
COPD symptoms may include:

- Shortness of breath
- Cough that does not go away
- Too much mucus production
- Wheezing (whistling noise from air flowing through a narrow airway)
- Tight feeling in chest
- Feeling tired (fatigue)
What you can do to breathe better

- Lifestyle changes are not always easy to make but are important for your health
  - Quit smoking
  - Avoid things that bother your lungs
  - Get flu and pneumonia vaccines as directed
  - Stay active and exercise
  - Eat healthy foods
  - Maintain a healthy weight
  - See your healthcare provider on a regular basis, even if you feel well
Things to avoid when you have COPD

- Your lungs are more sensitive to what you breathe in. Things that may bother your lungs include
  - Smoke, dust, pollen, and other airborne irritants
  - Pet dander (small bits of skin, hair, or feathers)
  - Strong odors (eg, from cleaning products, cooking, or perfume)
  - Extreme weather
You and your healthcare provider will manage your COPD by making a COPD treatment plan, including:

- Keeping a daily log of your symptoms
- Taking your medicines as directed by your healthcare provider, even when you feel good
- Making positive lifestyle changes
- Setting personal goals for activities you like
- Understanding what to do if your symptoms get worse
Understanding your COPD medicines

- There are 2 different kinds of COPD medicines
  - Many people with COPD use both kinds
    - **Everyday maintenance medicines** are long-acting bronchodilators and inhaled steroids
      - Taken every day on a regular schedule
    - **Rescue medicines** are short-acting bronchodilators
      - Taken only when breathing suddenly becomes difficult

- Talk with your healthcare provider about how to use your medicines
Although COPD has no cure, you can breathe better

- Learn all you can about COPD and your medicines
  - Do not be afraid to ask your healthcare provider questions
- Follow your COPD treatment plan
- Use special breathing techniques when you feel short of breath
  - Ask your healthcare provider about appropriate breathing techniques
- Get medical help when you need it
Tips to help you take action

- Learn about COPD and how to control it
  - Ask for written information and instructions

- Follow your COPD treatment plan
  - Talk with your healthcare provider about your progress and if you have trouble following the plan
  - Share your COPD treatment plan—especially information about the medicines you take—with your other healthcare providers

- Learn how and when to use your everyday maintenance and rescue medicines

- Use reminders (such as a sticky note on your refrigerator or a watch or alarm) to take your medicine at the same time every day