



## COPD Fact Sheet

**Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or COPD** is a term used to describe two related lung diseases i.e. chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

**Chronic bronchitis** is inflammation and eventual scarring of the **bronchi** (airway tubes).  
**Emphysema** is enlargement and destruction of the **alveoli** (air sacs) within the lungs.

Many persons with COPD have both of these conditions.

Persons with COPD have difficulty breathing because they develop smaller air passageways and have partially destroyed alveoli. The air passageways also become clogged with **mucus**, a slimy substance.

Cigarette smoking is the most important risk factor and cause of COPD.  
Up to 90% of COPD cases is caused by smoking.  
A smoker is 10 times more likely than a non-smoker to die of COPD.

### Symptoms of COPD

- Chronic cough
- Increased **sputum** (mucus coughed from the airways)
- Shortness of breath
- Limitation of physical activity

### Treatments for COPD

- Stopping smoking —to prevent worsening of the disease
- Bronchodilators — medications, often taken by an inhaler, that help open air passageways in the lungs
- Corticosteroids — medications taken by inhaler to counteract inflammation in the air passages and lungs
- Oxygen — can help patients with COPD who have a hard time getting enough oxygen; often stored in a portable tank
- Antibiotics — can be helpful for fighting bacterial infections that make symptoms of COPD worse

Cigarette smoking (tobacco) is a leading cause of preventable death world-wide and accounts for many thousands of deaths a year. Death due to COPD is the 4th leading cause of death after heart disease, cancer and stroke. Cigarette smoking is the most important risk factor for developing COPD, accounting for up to 90% of cases of COPD in economically developed countries. COPD is a disease that could be nearly eradicated if people did not smoke.