

Lung and Breathing Problems (COPD)



Our lungs help us to breathe air in and out of our bodies.



Lungs can get damaged or diseased.

Damage to your lungs is often called 'Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease' or COPD.



This makes it hard to breathe.



The main thing which causes COPD is smoking.



It can also be caused by some other things, like breathing in harmful dust and chemicals in the workplace.



Many people have COPD.

They are mainly middle-aged or older adults who smoke.



People with COPD usually find that it slowly gets harder for them to breathe over many years.



This can make it difficult to do normal everyday things.



COPD can be very serious. It can lead to death.

Symptoms of COPD



Symptoms are signs that something is wrong.

The main symptoms of COPD are:



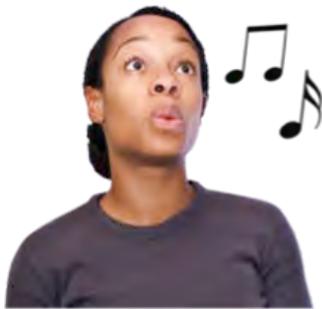
- Feeling more and more out of breath.



- A chesty cough that doesn't go away.



- Getting a lot of chest infections.



- Wheezing. This means you make a whistling sound when you breathe.



You should see your GP (doctor) if you have these signs and they don't go away.

Your GP will ask you questions and do some tests.



Tests can include:

- Breathing into a machine called a spirometer to see how well your lungs are working.



- Having a chest x-ray.



- Having a blood test.



You may need to go for more tests, like a scan of your lungs or heart.



Treatment for COPD

Treatment cannot repair your lungs.

But treatment can stop the damage to your lungs from getting worse.



Treatment can also help you to breathe more easily.



So you should get treatment as soon as you can.



There are some different treatments you might have.



- **Stopping smoking**

Stopping smoking is the best way to stop your breathing problems from getting worse.



If you need help to stop smoking you can speak to your GP.

Or you can visit the [NHS Smokefree website](https://www.nhs.uk/stop-smoking).



- **Using an inhaler**

You put the end into your mouth and then breathe in.

It gets medicine straight to your lungs to help you to breathe more easily.



- **Taking medicine**

If an inhaler does not help you, you might need to take some medicine as well.



- **Pulmonary rehabilitation**

This is where you go to group sessions for 6 weeks to:



- o Do exercise like walking, cycling and strength exercises.



- o Learn how to cope with your breathing problems.



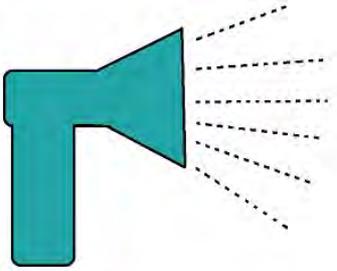
- o Learn about the best foods to eat.



- o Help you to feel better about yourself.

- **Using special equipment**

If your breathing problems are very bad, you might need special equipment to help you to breath.



A Nebuliser is a machine which turns medicine into mist. You can breathe it in through a mouthpiece or face mask.

This means you can get a lot of medicine at once. You can use this machine at home.



For **long-term oxygen therapy**, you will connect yourself to the machine with a long tube.

You have to do this for at least 16 hours a day. You can move around your house while you do this.



Non-invasive ventilation: A mask goes over your face.

It is linked to a machine which will help your lungs to work.



- **Having an operation**

If medicine does not work, you might be able to have an operation.

The operations you might have are:

- A bullectomy: to take away a pocket of air from your lungs.
- Lung volume reduction surgery: to take away a badly damaged section of your lungs.
- A lung transplant: to replace your lung with a healthy lung from someone who has died.



These are very big operations. You would be put to sleep while the operation takes place.



There are big risks with these operations.

You should speak to your doctor before deciding whether to have an operation.



Care for COPD

It is important to take good care of yourself.



Take your medicine.

If it is making you feel unwell, speak to your doctor. Do not stop taking your medicine before speaking to your doctor.



If you smoke, stop smoking.



Keep active. This can help you to stay well and feel better.

Speak to your doctor if you are unsure how much exercise you can do.



Try to stay a healthy weight.

Being overweight can make it harder to breathe.



Have jabs to protect you from catching pneumonia or flu.



Very hot or cold weather can make your breathing problems worse.

Check the weather and make sure you have the right medicine with you.



Try not to breath in too much of things like dust, fumes from cars, air freshener, hairspray and perfume.



Go for check-ups with your GP.



You can learn some special ways to help you to breathe more easily, such as relaxed deep breathing.

You can get more information from the [British Lung Foundation](https://www.britishlungfoundation.org.uk).



Talk to other people about how you feel.

You might like to join a [support group](#) near you.



Talk to your family about how your breathing problems make you feel.

Other Things To Think About



If you are in a sexual relationship, your breathing problems might make it difficult to have sex. Talk to your partner. You might be able to get some advice from your doctor or nurse.



If you want to fly on an aeroplane, you should visit your GP. They will do a test to see what help you might need to be able to fly safely.



If you cannot work you can get money from benefits.



You might want to plan what you would like to happen if you become so ill that you could die.

Talk to your doctor and your family and friends about this.

This can be difficult, but many people find it helps.