



Centerville Family Practice, P.C.

The Road To Health Starts Here

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COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease)

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1. What is COPD?

COPD is Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease; it is a general term for several related diseases (emphysema, chronic bronchitis, some forms of asthma) that cause airflow blockages and breathing problems. This can cause problems while working, exercising, or thinking, and can result in poor health, prolonged illnesses, and hospital visits.

2. How does it happen?

COPD occurs as result of chronic irritation to the lungs creating scar tissue and can occur due to smoking, air pollution, chemical exposure, or for genetic reasons. Most COPD in the USA occurs as a result of exposure to cigarette smoke. Because COPD most commonly happens due to chronic irritation it can take years of exposure before symptoms occur. People with genetic risk may experience symptoms faster.

3. Is there a treatment?

Yes, the scarring that occurs cannot be changed but there are treatments to slow or stop further scarring and there are treatments that help to improve lung function. If you smoke the most important thing you can do is **stop smoking**.

4. What is the treatment?

COPD is treated both with medications taken by mouth and with medications that you inhale. The medications taken by mouth are anti-inflammatory medications that reduce inflammation throughout the body. Inhaled medications can contain anti-inflammatory medications that are taken in directly by the lung, as well as medications that cause the lung to open more widely.

5. Are there side effects of treatment?

Yes, every medication can have a side effect. The oral anti-inflammatory medications can make it easier for the body to get infections, and may cause bloating and weight gain. The inhaled medications can result in infection to the throat and can cause light headedness or a rapid heart rate. Lastly, all medications contain a small risk of allergic response.

6. What happens if I wait for treatment?

COPD causes permanent changes to the lungs. Treatment can help to improve function that comes from recent swelling and can slow progression of the disease but cannot reverse changes that have already occurred.

7. Warning signs to look out for (an exacerbation)

A COPD exacerbation is when lung function rapidly declines in a short period of time. This can be due to an infection, an allergy, or other causes. The result is a worsening of symptoms and may include increased wheezing or coughing, increased mucous production with fever, confusion, or swelling in the ankles. It is important to recognize when symptoms have rapidly worsened and to go to the doctor for treatment.

8. Additional Information.

Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/copd/index.html>

American Family Physician: <https://www.aafp.org/afp/2007/1015/p1151.html>