

COPD: Fact Sheet

COPD is a preventable, yet widespread disease that can greatly impact one's quality of life.

The disease affects approximately 30 million Americans but only 17 million are diagnosed.



What is COPD?

COPD stands for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It is a progressive, debilitating respiratory disease that causes restricted airflow and breathing problems.

If left untreated, people with COPD gradually lose their ability to perform daily activities.

What are the symptoms of COPD?

COPD develops over many years, making it hard to diagnose in the early stages.

Symptoms may include:

- Chronic cough
- Shortness of breath doing everyday activities
- Inability to breathe deeply
- Excess mucus
- Wheezing or chest tightness



What are the most common risk factors of COPD?

Risk factors include:



History of smoking



Long term exposure to lung irritants such as smoke or fires, chemical fumes, dust and air pollution



Being age 40 and older



History of asthma or childhood respiratory infections



Underdeveloped lungs



Alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency, a rare genetic condition



How can COPD affect patients and their families?

Patients with COPD may face a financial burden because of lost wages and the out-of-pocket cost of treatment.

It may also raise the risk for other health conditions, including:

- Lung infections such as flu and pneumonia
- Lung cancer
- Heart problems
- Weak muscles and brittle bones
- Depression and anxiety



What can help manage COPD?

Although COPD gets progressively worse, treatments are available. Options include:

- Pulmonary rehabilitation
- Supplemental oxygen
- Medications like steroids and inhalers
- Surgery
- Clinical trials



How can policymakers help?

Although COPD is the 6th leading cause of death in the United States, the disease needs more awareness and funding.

Supporting COPD patients starts with:



Elevating COPD as a public health priority



Ensuring funding for COPD research



Improving patients' ability to access screening and appropriate treatment



Increasing awareness and education

New, innovative treatments for COPD are emerging, making it critical that patients have timely access to treatment.

