

WELLBEING

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COPD And The Air You Breathe

Early Diagnosis and Treatment Are Key to Managing COPD

What's the fourth-leading cause of death in the U.S.? It's one you may not be familiar with: COPD or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. November is National COPD Awareness Month – a good time to learn more about how to prevent, detect and treat this condition.

What is COPD?

According to Mayo Clinic, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease is “a group of lung diseases that block airflow and make it increasingly difficult to breathe.”

Tobacco smoke (including second hand smoke) is responsible for up to 90% of COPD cases. Other causes include exposure to indoor or outdoor pollutants such as toxic chemicals, and a rare genetic condition known as Alpha-1-Antitrypsin Deficiency.

The primary COPD diseases are:

- Emphysema - chest tightness, wheezing and shortness of breath during physical activity.
- Chronic bronchitis - chronic cough (and yellow sputum), the need to clear the throat in the morning, recurring respiratory infections, and shortness of breath in later stages.

COPD is not asthma. This table points out the difference.

Factor	Asthma	COPD
Age it begins	Usually in childhood	Generally later in adulthood; can be in the early 40s
Progression	Generally does not get worse with age	Becomes worse over time
Trigger / Causes	Allergens , weather, humidity	Directly linked to smoking. Less common: inhaled fumes, pollutants, dust, chemicals
Apperance of Symptoms	Can be symptom-free between attacks	Can occur almost any time
Airflow Correction	Treatment can usually restore airflow quickly and fully	Quitting smoking, taking medications can partially restore airflow

Prevention and Diagnosis

- Don't smoke, or quit smoking; stay away from second-hand smoke.
- Always wear protective gear including mask and gloves when working around hazardous chemicals, dust or other types of lung irritants.
- If your doctor says you are at risk for developing COPD, get a yearly flu shot.
- Improve the air quality in your home (See article on Page 2).
- A spirometry test can detect COPD early. It's a noninvasive procedure that measures the air that can be exhaled from the lungs after deep inhalations.

COPD Article Sources: About.com; American Assn. for Respiratory Care; Mayo Clinic; National Heart Lung & Blood Institute, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services; spiriva.com; Yahoo! Health.

Treating COPD

COPD cannot be cured but it can be treated and managed through:

Medication with either brochodilators or inhaled steroids.

Oxygen Therapy.

Protein Therapy to slow lung damage.

Pulmonary Rehabilitation including lower and upper body exercises, patient education, breathing retraining and emotional support.

Surgery, which entails removing parts of damaged lungs and may mean a lung transplant.

Walking on a regular basis can improve the body's ability to use oxygen, building endurance, strengthening muscles and making it easier to breathe during daily activities.

Free COPD Report

Request a free Guide to New Treatments for COPD At the John Hopkins Health Alerts site.

www.johnshopkinshealthalerts.com/alerts



All You Need is The Air You Breathe: Make Sure It's Home Sweet Home

Pollutants and irritants can be everywhere in your daily life – cars and buses, construction sites and factories, smog, second-hand smoke and second-hand perfume.

The one place where you can control air quality is within your own home. Here are some ideas to help your family breathe easier.

Identify and Eliminate the Indoor Air Polluting Culprits

- Allergens cause an allergic response in your immune system. Common allergens include pollen (brought in from outdoors), pet dander, dust mites, cockroaches and rodents.
- Irritants are substances that irritate your respiratory system but don't cause an immune response. Common irritants are paint, stains and wood finishes, pesticides, tobacco smoke, chemicals in cleaning products and new furniture smells.
- Dangerous chemicals such as carbon monoxide and radon. Both are highly poisonous and should be eliminated from your home.

Bring the Green Indoors

Plants will do more than add color and interest to a room. They act as natural air cleaners and will help balance indoor humidity. And they don't all need bright sun. Plants that originally came from tropical forests do well in darker rooms. Ask a local horticulture center or greenhouse to help you select the best plants to keep your home's air fresh. A few they might recommend are the Areca palm, Reed palm, Dwarf Date palm, Boston fern, Rubber plant and English ivy.

Another benefit of real plants vs. plastic or silk ones: they don't collect dust like artificial greenery.

Living Room, Great Room and Bedrooms

Freshen the air by opening a window or using an exhaust fan. (The organic compounds emitted by air freshener products can irritate eyes or cause headaches.)

Wipe down air conditioning and radiator vents where the air comes out to prevent dust from recirculating.

Keep dust mites at bay. You can't see these tiny creatures, but inhaling their feces and shell particles can damage lungs. Since they feed on dead skin cells (animal and human), your best defense is to wash bed linens every week, make sure indoor humidity stays below 50% and *keep pets off the furniture*.

In the Kitchen

- Toss wet sponges into the microwave on high for one minute after each use.
- Wash sponges with your dishes - in the top drawer of the dishwasher.
- Boil sponges in a pan of water for about 10 minutes once a week.

In the Bathroom

Choose a cloth shower curtain or try nylon as hotels do. Nylon doesn't need a liner and can be cleaned in the washing machine. Vinyl shower curtains and liners are generally made of PVC (polyvinyl chloride), which releases odors and gases into the air for months or even years.

Reduce or eliminate health and beauty aid products that contain chemicals, or even heavy scents if you have people with allergies/asthma in the house.

Clean with non-chemical products.

In the Laundry Room

Use dye-free, scent-free, phosphate-free detergents, especially on towels, sheets and pillowcases.

Add Borax to your wash as a natural whitener / brightener.

Tackle stains naturally:

- Hydrogen peroxide works on juice, soda, coffee, and tea.
- Club soda (plain) will take out stains from wine, juice, etc.
- Zap grease with cornstarch, corn meal, or baking soda. Sprinkle it on and brush it off when the grease is absorbed.
- Use your regular detergent to pre-treat stains and wash in cold water since warm or hot water can set the stain.
- Dry clothes outside when possible. Drying whites in the sun keeps them bright.

Look for household products and devices that are certified by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, at: www.asthmaandallergyfriendly.com

Clear air article sources: about.com; Care2.com

