

Managing COPD™

Spring 2022



COPD in Utah

The American Lung Association reports more than 16 million Americans have been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). That's why it's so important that individuals with COPD recognize the signs and symptoms of the disease, starting with the conditions that lead to a diagnosis.

COPD is a label that applies to a group of diseases that make it hard to breathe by restricting airflow. Emphysema and chronic bronchitis are two of the main conditions that contribute to COPD. Tobacco smoking has also been identified as a direct cause of both conditions and COPD. However, it is important to know that the condition can also be caused by repeated exposure to air pollution, such as secondhand smoke. According to the CDC, some individuals may even be genetically predisposed to the disease.

That being said, smoking remains the leading cause.

As a chronic illness, COPD affects both the physical and mental well-being of patients. 70 percent of people with COPD said that difficulty breathing changed their quality of life, while 61 percent shared that their activity levels were negatively impacted. Such limitations can lead to frustration, depression, and anxiety. In fact, 30 percent of Utahans with COPD shared that they experienced poor mental health days as a result of the disease.

The symptoms of COPD are not the only concern patients may have. One-third of COPD patients reported that the cost of healthcare was a concern or obstacle to seeking medical advice about their diagnosis. In Utah alone, 46 percent of patients use at least one medication daily, while 50 percent have visited a doctor due to their symptoms within the past year. Despite these difficulties, it is critical that you continually communicate with your healthcare team about your condition.

COPD can have a huge impact on your life. If you are seeking support or have questions, talk to your doctor.

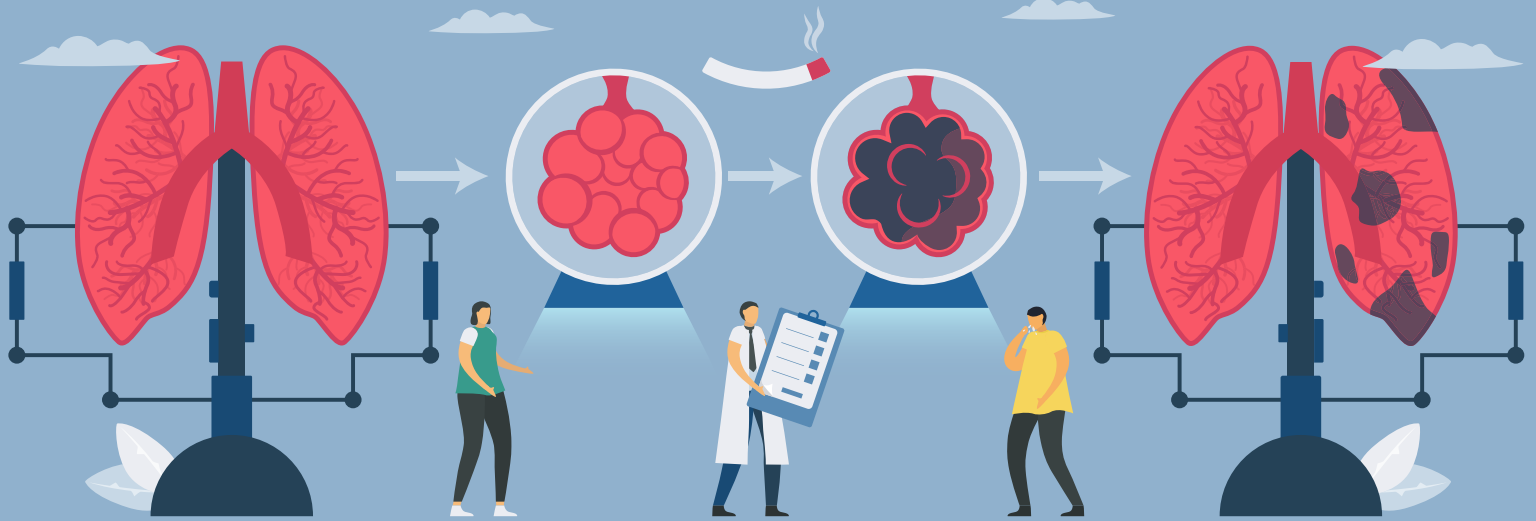
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Facts About Pneumococcal Pneumonia and COPD

If you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), you are still at risk for contracting pneumococcal pneumonia—even if the weather is warming up.

Pneumococcal pneumonia is caused by pneumococcal bacteria that are spread through respiratory secretions like saliva and mucus. The bacteria cause the affected, or inflamed, air sacs to fill with fluid. This puts more pressure on a person’s ability to breathe effectively.

For most healthy people, contact with the bacteria may result in mild discomfort or no symptoms at all. However, COPD patients are far more likely to experience severe symptoms, many of which mimic signs of a COPD flare-up, or exacerbation, such as shortness of breath and tightening in the chest. Other symptoms include:

- Headaches
- Body aches
- Shaking/chills
- High fever
- Wheezing
- Unexplained weakness or fatigue
- Restlessness
- Confusion
- Slurred speech
- Unusual irritability
- Changes in sputum color or consistency

Untreated pneumococcal pneumonia in COPD patients can lead to very serious conditions, such as acute respiratory distress, heart problems, and kidney damage.

Individuals with COPD conditions, including emphysema and chronic bronchitis; diabetes; chronic lung, kidney, or liver disease; cochlear implants; and those who smoke are all at an increased risk for contracting pneumococcal pneumonia.

If your COPD symptoms worsen, or you begin experiencing pneumonia-like symptoms, call your doctor right away. The following are precautions you can take to decrease your risk of contracting pneumococcal pneumonia:

- Avoid people who have been coughing or ill
- Wash hands frequently
- Stop smoking, which complicates COPD as well as pneumonia
- Discuss the flu, whooping cough, and pneumococcal vaccine with your doctor

References: “COPD and Pneumonia: What Is the Connection?” Medical News Today, MediLexicon International, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/315713#Understanding%20the%20connection>.

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“Pneumococcal Disease: Risk Factors and Transmission.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 Sept. 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/pneumococcal/about/risk-transmission.html>.

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Talking to Your Doctor About COPD

Effective communication with your doctor is a vital part of managing your chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). To make the most of your next doctor's appointment, take some time to write down any questions, concerns, or topics you would like to discuss. Consider the following:

- Have you experienced exacerbations?
- Have your sleeping patterns changed?
- Has your coughing increased?
- Has your sputum changed consistency or color?

Your ability to effectively communicate with your healthcare team will improve as you learn more about your COPD. To get started, consider the following questions:

HOW CAN I GET THE BEST RESULTS FROM MY MEDICATIONS?

One of the best ways to manage your COPD is to ensure that you are taking the right dosage of the right medications at the right time. If you have any questions about your medication usage, talk to your doctor.

WHAT IS INVOLVED WITH PULMONARY REHABILITATION?

Doctors may prescribe pulmonary rehabilitation therapy to improve your breathing ability. Make sure you not only understand the exercises, but also the expected milestones and timelines for treatment.

WHAT VACCINES ARE IMPORTANT?

Illnesses such as a cold or the flu present a risk for COPD patients no matter the season. Because such illnesses can further impair your breathing, it is important that you get your recommended vaccinations. Talk to your doctor to learn more about recommended vaccines and their side effects.

HOW CAN I MANAGE MY SYMPTOMS?

The answer to this question depends on your symptoms. Consider how often you cough, the length of your coughing episodes, and the amount of sputum produced. You may also consider how these symptoms are affecting your daily life. Are they stopping you from engaging in activities? Talk to your doctor about how you can minimize your exacerbations.

WHAT LIFESTYLE CHANGES WOULD HELP IN MANAGING COPD?

Lifestyle changes, such as choosing to quit smoking, can make a difference in your overall health. The same can be said for adding regular exercise to your routine, and improving your nutrition. Talk to your doctor about available support and resources.

Your healthcare visits don't have to feel like a waste of time. Be open and honest with your healthcare team, and don't be afraid to prepare questions. They're there to help.

References: Myers, Wyatt. "Talking with Your Doctor about COPD Treatment." Healthgrades, Healthgrades, 2 Aug. 2020, <https://www.healthgrades.com/right-care/copd/talking-with-your-doctor-about-copd-treatment>.

"Top 5 Questions to Ask Your Doctor about COPD." Top 5 Questions to Ask Your Doctor about COPD | American Lung Association, <https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/top-5-questions-to-ask-your-doctor>.



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2. Si desea leer este boletín en español, visite **selecthealth.org/wellness/newsletters**.



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