



## FACTS

According to the World Health Organisation, 64 million people worldwide have Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

While the prevalence varies from country to country, around one in every 13 Australians over the age of 40 have the illness.

# COPD

Chronic Obstructive  
Pulmonary Disease



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## WHAT IS CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD)?

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a common lung disease caused by obstruction of the small airways within the lungs. It can be known as emphysema or chronic bronchitis.

If COPD develops, it can be treated but not cured. However with early detection and treatment, the long term outlook for patients is greatly improved.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- Breathlessness
- Chronic cough
- Persistent sputum production
- Recurrent chest infections
- Chest tightness
- Wheezing
- Airway irritability

As symptoms develop gradually, people with COPD often attribute their breathlessness to ageing or a lack of fitness. A good guide is to compare whether you tend to be more breathless than healthy individuals of your age.

### WHO GETS COPD?

COPD essentially develops as a result of long-term exposure to airborne toxins. Current or previous tobacco smoking causes the majority of COPD in Australia.

Exposure to passive smoke, outdoor air pollution, occupational chemicals and dusts are other known risk factors. Indoor air pollution is an increasingly recognised cause of COPD, especially in migrants from countries where cooking and heating is done by burning coal and biomass fuels.

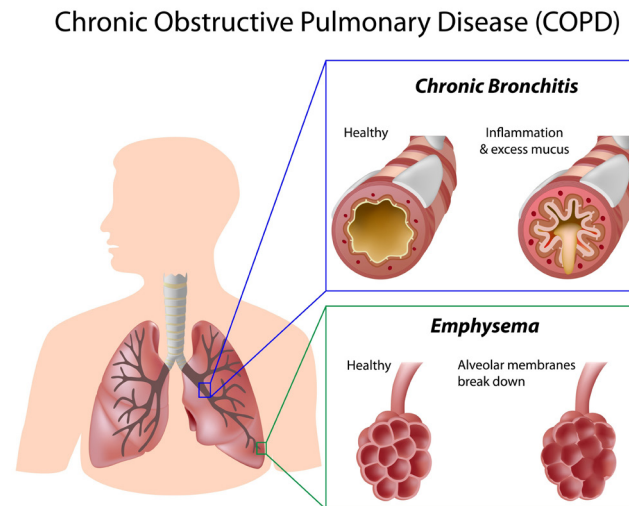
Genetic factors can also play a role, with the deficiency of an enzyme known as alpha-1 antitrypsin associated with early onset COPD.

## WHY DO YOU NEED TO TREAT COPD?

Early diagnosis and treatment of COPD will result in better outcomes. If you are diagnosed with COPD, treatment is directed towards improving your health through:

- Relieving breathlessness
- Improving exercise tolerance
- Slowing disease progression
- Reducing the complications of COPD
- Preventing and treating exacerbations (flare-ups) of disease
- Reducing the mortality associated with COPD

Although not curable, treating COPD can result in significant improvement in health status and quality of life.



### DIAGNOSING COPD

The diagnosis of COPD is dependent on taking a careful history and performing a thorough physical examination. Specialised breathing tests are necessary and other tests are often required. These may be to assess the severity of disease, look for complications or exclude other possible diagnoses.

Testing may include a chest x-ray or CT (CAT scan), blood tests, sputum sample testing, cardiac ultrasound and overnight sleep studies.

## TREATING COPD

Quitting smoking is the most important step to preventing COPD or, if it is already present, slowing the worsening of COPD. Current drug treatments improve symptoms and reduce the impact of chest infections.

Treatment starts with inhaled medications that open up the airways, known as bronchodilators. Some people require the addition of anti-inflammatory medications such as steroids. Vaccinations should also be considered annually to minimize the risk of worsening symptoms.

It is important to maintain fitness to minimise any effects on your muscles and bone density. Exercise programs and pulmonary rehabilitation programs are available to help you maintain the best possible health.

### HOW WE CAN HELP YOU

Our researchers study the prevalence, causes, prevention, better methods of diagnosis and new treatments. We translate this into clinical practice, placing us at the forefront of medicine.

Our expert clinicians can assess patients with COPD with a view to optimising symptom control and improving quality of life.

At the Woolcock Clinic, we can make an appointment for you to see a respiratory specialist who will sit down with you and work out the cause of your symptoms. Once this is established we can discuss with you the treatment options and find the one that is best suited to you.

The Woolcock Institute of Medical Research is a not-for-profit organisation.

If you are interested in further information about becoming involved in our research studies or donations, please visit our website [www.woolcock.org.au](http://www.woolcock.org.au).

Your contribution will make a difference.  
Thank you for your support.