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Breathing easy

How lung disease can affect you and your loved ones

Do you have trouble breathing? Do you smoke? If so, you may be at risk for getting lung disease.

Lung disease is one of the more common health problems today. It refers to a set of different conditions, such as:[1]

- Asthma
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Lung cancer
- Pneumonia

If you combined all types of lung disease, it is the third-leading cause of death in the United States.[1]

People with all types of lung disease have one thing in common: they have trouble breathing. For example, COPD partly blocks your airways, making it difficult to get air in and out of your lungs. COPD includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema.[1]

Let's take a closer look at some common lung diseases.

Asthma

Asthma is a long-term lung disease that inflames and narrows your airways, which are the paths that carry air to your lungs. It strikes people of all ages but often starts in childhood. In fact, of the 22 million people who have asthma, nearly six million are children.[2]

Signs of asthma include:

- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Tightness in the chest
- Coughing in the early morning or at night (also called "flare-ups" or "attacks")[3]

People with asthma have airways that are sensitive to certain substances that are breathed in. These are called triggers, and they are different for each person. Triggers include:[2]

- Mites, animal fur and cockroaches
- Mold and pollens from trees, grasses and flowers
- Cigarette smoke, air pollution, workplace chemicals and aerosol sprays
- Physical activity
- Infections in your nose or throat

During a flare-up, your body's airways swell and become narrower. This lets less air move in and out of your lungs. Your body may make more mucus than normal, which clogs up the airways even more.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

COPD includes two lung diseases that are usually found together.

- **Emphysema** can lead to shortness of breath and trouble breathing out.[4,5]
- **Chronic bronchitis** irritates and inflames the lining of your airways. The lining will get thicker and mucus clogs the airways. The result is a constant cough and problems breathing.[4,5]

COPD cannot be cured. The disease happens slowly, and as it gets worse, your quality of life suffers. Simple daily actions like walking, cooking and bathing may become hard or even impossible.[4]

Smoking causes 80% to 90% of COPD deaths. Quitting smoking is the best way to both lower the chance of getting COPD and slow it down if you have the disease.[4]

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Lung cancer

Among deaths from cancer in the U.S., lung cancer tops the list.[6] Cancer causes your body cells to break down; cells divide very fast and make too much tissue, forming a tumor.

Lung cancer and smoking go hand in hand. Smoking is the number-one cause of lung cancer, and causes more than 87% of lung cancer cases.[7]

Quitting the smoking habit helps lower the risk of getting lung cancer. In fact, your body begins to heal right away:

- 20 minutes after you quit, your heart rate drops.
- 12 hours later, carbon monoxide levels in your blood begin to drop to normal.
- 10 years later, your chance of dying from lung cancer is half that of people who keep smoking.[8]

If you have the signs for any of these lung diseases, see your doctor and find out if you need treatment.

Getting help and information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Telephone: 800-232-4636
Website: cdc.gov

Smokefree.gov
Smoking Quitline: 877-44U-QUIT
Website: smokefree.gov

American Lung Association
Telephone: 800-LUNGUSA
Website: lungusa.org

National Cancer Institute
Telephone: 800-4-CANCER
Website: cancer.gov

Womenshealth.gov
Telephone: 800-994-9662
Website: womenshealth.gov

Visit anthem.com/ca for more ways to get healthy – and stay healthy.

Sources

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[2] National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, *What Is Asthma?* (February 2011): nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/asthma/

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[4] American Lung Association, *Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) Fact Sheet* (June 2009): lungusa.org

[5] National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, *What Is COPD?* (March 2009): nhlbi.nih.gov

[6] National Cancer Institute, *Common Cancer Types* (July 2011): cancer.gov

[7] American Cancer Society, *Cancer Facts & Figures 2011* (2011): cancer.org

[8] Office of Women's Health, *What happens to your body when you quit smoking?* (May 2010): womenshealth.gov/smoking-how-to-quit/tools/what-happens-when-you-quit-smoking.cfm

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