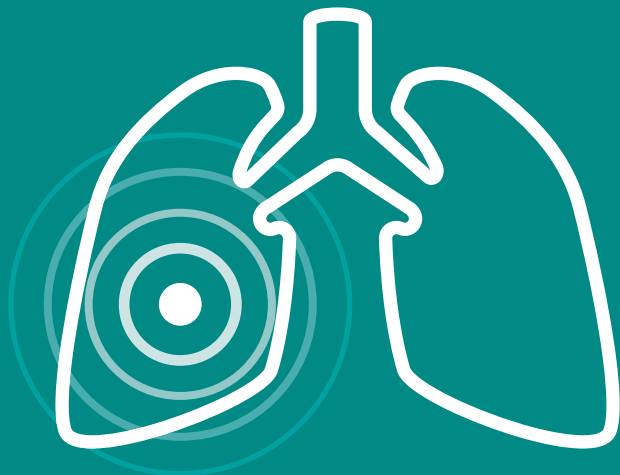




# COPD

## Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke  
Scotland



### ESSENTIAL GUIDE

# **This Essential Guide is about chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).**

**It explains:**

- what COPD is
- answers to some of the most common questions about COPD
- what you can do to help manage your COPD.

# What is COPD?

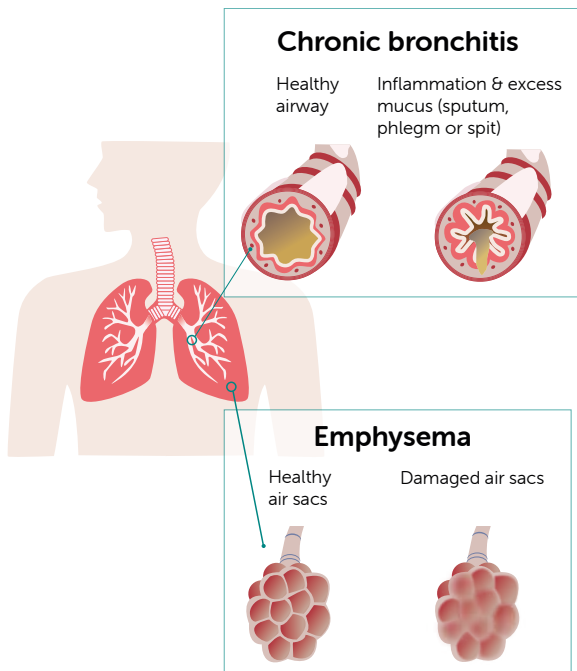
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or COPD is the name given to a group of long-term health conditions that cause breathing difficulties and long-term damage to your airways. This makes it harder for air to move in and out of your lungs.

<b>CHRONIC</b>	= long-term, permanent
<b>OBSTRUCTIVE</b>	= describes the narrowing of the airways
<b>PULMONARY</b>	= affects the lungs
<b>DISEASE</b>	= illness

# COPD includes:

**Chronic bronchitis** - long-term inflammation of your airways.

**Emphysema** - narrowing of your airways and damage to the air sacs in your lungs.

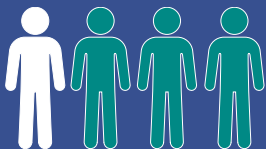


# What causes COPD?

The main cause of COPD is smoking.

Other causes include:

- working around dust, chemicals or fumes, now or in the past
- poor air quality
- long-term asthma
- genetic factors.



Up to **1 out of every 4** people who are long-term smokers will develop COPD.

# What are the main symptoms of COPD?

The main symptoms of COPD are:



wheezing

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coughing

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feeling breathless  
during everyday  
activities such as  
walking or shopping

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producing mucus  
(sputum, phlegm, spit)

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extreme tiredness  
(fatigue).

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### **Other common symptoms include:**

- regular chest infections
  - reduced appetite
  - weight loss.
-

# How is COPD diagnosed?

To find out if you have COPD your doctor will ask you questions and may do some tests. These can include blood tests, breathing tests and a chest x-ray.

Early diagnosis and treatment of COPD can make a big difference. However, many people do not know they have COPD. Some people have symptoms for many years before going to the doctor.

There is currently no cure for COPD and symptoms usually get slowly worse over time. However, there are many things you can do to help manage your symptoms and have a good quality of life.



# What is the treatment for COPD?

If you have COPD you may be referred to a specialist clinic to make sure you get the right treatment.

You may also see other health professionals who will give you advice and support to help you manage your symptoms and make everyday life easier.



The most common treatment for COPD is medication given to you using an inhaler, spacer or nebuliser. These help you to breathe medicine straight into your lungs.

Your doctor will discuss with you if an inhaler, spacer or nebuliser is right for you.



It is important you know how to use your inhaler, spacer or nebuliser in the right way to get the most benefit. Ask your nurse or other healthcare professional to check that you are using yours in the right way.



You can find out more about inhalers and how to use them at **[www.mylungsmylife.org](http://www.mylungsmylife.org)**

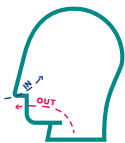
## Other medication

- If your COPD suddenly gets worse, this is called a flare-up or exacerbation.



- If you have an exacerbation, your doctor may prescribe medication such as steroids or antibiotics.

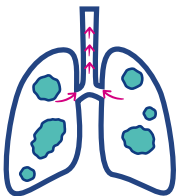
# Breathing techniques



Breathing control techniques can help with breathlessness. They involve gentle breathing using your diaphragm (your main breathing muscle).



The way you sit or stand can also help you to breathe more easily.



Your health professional can also give you chest clearing techniques to help you remove mucus from your lungs and breathe more easily.

# Can I still be physically active?



Yes! **It is very important to stay active if you have COPD.** Avoiding activity makes your breathlessness worse. There is lots of evidence to show that staying active can help you with your COPD.



Regular physical activity helps to improve your breathing, increase your energy levels and improve your overall health. The more activity you do, the more you will be able to do.



Talk to your GP or health professional about what physical activity is right for you. They can help you decide what activities are best. What you do will depend on your symptoms and what activities you like.



## Pulmonary rehabilitation

You may want to ask if you can be referred for **pulmonary rehabilitation (PR)**. PR is a programme of exercise, education and support to help you manage your COPD and improve your fitness. Everything you do in PR will be adapted to make sure it is safe and right for you.

# What else can I do to help manage my COPD and live well?

There are many other things you can do to help you manage your COPD and live well.

## Stop smoking



**If you smoke, stopping smoking is the most important thing you can do to help your COPD.**

- Stopping smoking will help to slow down or prevent any more damage to your lungs.
-



- Smoking damages your lungs, narrows your airways and causes mucus to build up. This makes it harder for you to breathe.
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- There is lots of free support available to help you stop smoking. Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for information or call **Quit Your Way Scotland** on **0800 848 484**.
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## **Manage your weight, eat well and drink sensibly**



Eating a healthy diet and limiting your alcohol intake are important for your general health and to help avoid or fight infections.



Managing your weight is also important. Extra weight around your lungs and chest, or being underweight, can prevent your lungs from working well.

## **Keep up to date with your vaccinations**



Exacerbations or flare-ups of COPD are often caused by viruses and bacteria and can result in chest infections.

Being vaccinated reduces your risk of chest infections and helps to reduce how bad they are if you do get them.



# Know your triggers



For some people things like smoke and pollen can make their breathlessness worse.

Learn what makes your breathlessness worse (your triggers) and try to avoid them.



Text **WEATHER** to **66777** to receive a free 'Air Quality and Weather' text message from Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland.

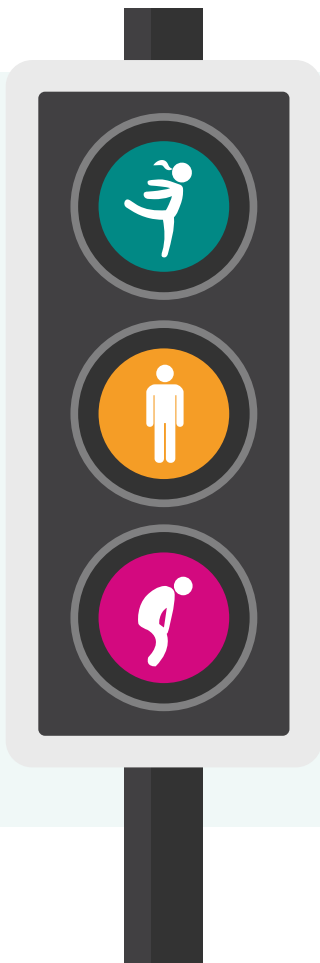
The text will tell you about outdoor conditions in your local area that may affect your breathing.

# What should I do if my symptoms change?

**Keep an eye on your symptoms and know when to see your doctor.**

- You might find that your COPD suddenly gets worse. This is called a flare-up or exacerbation.
- If you have any sudden changes in your symptoms, you should tell your doctor, nurse or health professional straight away. Early treatment might mean you won't need to go to hospital.
- Meet with your doctor or nurse at least once a year to talk about how you are managing your COPD.

Speak to your doctor or nurse about getting the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland '**Traffic Lights for COPD**' resource. The resource helps you to better understand your COPD and know what to do if you become unwell. Healthcare professionals can access the resource from **[www.chss.org.uk/publications](http://www.chss.org.uk/publications)**.



Our publications are available for free to anyone in Scotland who needs them. Go to **[www.chss.org.uk/publications](http://www.chss.org.uk/publications)** for all our resources, including other Essential Guides in this series.

For free, confidential advice and support from our **Advice Line nurses**, call: 0808 801 0899 (Mon-Fri 9.30am-4pm), text: NURSE to 66777 or email: [adviceline@chss.org.uk](mailto:adviceline@chss.org.uk).

Across Scotland, over one million people – that's one in five of us – are living with the effects of a chest, heart or stroke condition. We are here to help everyone who needs us. But we need your support to do this. Go to **[www.chss.org.uk/supportus](http://www.chss.org.uk/supportus)** to find out how you can help more people in Scotland.

**If you would like this resource in an alternative format, please contact our Advice Line nurses.**

**Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke  
Scotland**



**NO LIFE HALF LIVED**

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