

Information for patients

What is COPD?

COPD means Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. (Chronic means long term) It is a long term condition that includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema to varying degrees.

Chronic bronchitis is an inflammation of the airways, (the tubes that carry air to the lung tissue) leading to chronic cough and sputum, airway narrowing and breathlessness.

How does COPD affect people?

You may notice that you are less active. You may experience shortness of breath, cough and sputum production. This may have happened gradually over a long period of time.

Living with a long term condition like COPD can lead to anxiety or feeling low in mood. This can be addressed with your GP.

This leaflet aims to explain your condition, how it affects you and helps you to manage your COPD.

What causes COPD?

Smoking is the most common cause of COPD. Stopping smoking reduces the risk of developing COPD, reduces the speed of COPD progression. Some occupations and inherited enzyme deficiencies can cause COPD (especially in smokers).

How is COPD Diagnosed?

You may have noticed that you have a cough, sputum, or breathlessness. This may be intermittent such as winter bronchitis or it may be continuous. The sooner you seek help the better the outcome.

Your GP will confirm the diagnosis of COPD with spirometry. Spirometry is a breathing test where you breathe out into a machine. This will indicate if your airways are narrowed.

You may have a chest x-ray or a complex test such as CT scan or breathing test if there is uncertainty about your diagnosis.

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Keeping Healthy

Unfortunately, once you have COPD it cannot be cured. Many people with severe COPD can manage to live full and active lives. There are many things you can do to keep yourself healthy:

- **Stopping smoking** is the most important thing you can do. There are many support services to help you, which will improve your chances of quitting. Please ask your GP or Respiratory Team to refer you to the Stop Smoking Service
- **Keep fit** Maintain regular activities. It is ok to get out of breath and know your limits
- **Diet** is important. Try to eat a healthy diet that includes your 5 a day. Aim to achieve your ideal weight. Being over-weight puts even more strain on your lungs, being too thin weakens your muscles. Ask your Respiratory Team for the Improving Your Nutrition in COPD Leaflet
- **Medications.** If your doctor has prescribed you any medications, it is important to take them. If you are on inhalers, it is recommended that your inhaler technique is checked regularly
- **Self-Management Plan.** Your Respiratory Nurse will provide you with your own COPD Self-Management Plan to help you recognise changes in your condition and what action to take
- **Rescue medication.** Your doctor may provide you with antibiotics and steroid tablets to keep at home if your COPD gets worse. Take rescue medication as instructed. Follow your Self-Management Plan
- **Influenza and pneumonia vaccinations** are recommended. These are available from your GP practice
- **Pulmonary Rehabilitation** is available locally to people with COPD. This covers exercise, education and support. Pulmonary Rehabilitation is an excellent way to regain your fitness and can be accessed via your G.P. or Respiratory Team
- **MyCOPD App** is available for patients who have a Smart phone, tablet or computer to help you manage your condition. Please ask the Respiratory Team for information about the app
- **Non-invasive ventilation (NIV)** therapy is available to patients with persistent hypercapnia. Hypercapnia is excessive carbon dioxide in the blood, which can occur in COPD
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy** may be available to patients who experience anxiety with symptoms of COPD. Please ask your Respiratory Team for referral
- **Oxygen** therapy may be available to patients after assessment. **Oxygen is not a treatment for breathlessness**
- **Fan Therapy** helps with breathlessness. Research shows that cold air from a fan, directed towards the nose and mouth can be very helpful at reducing the feeling of breathlessness

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Reference

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2018) Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease.

Contact Details for Further Information

Respiratory Nurse Team: Telephone 03033 304336

Any Comments, Compliments, Concerns or Complaints

If you have any other concerns please talk to your nurse, therapist or doctor. Our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) are available on 03033 306518 (Grimsby, Scunthorpe and Goole). You can also contact nlg-tr.PALS@nhs.net

As a Trust we value equality of access to our information and services, therefore alternative formats available on request at nlg-tr.interpreters@nhs.net

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