



November is Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Awareness Month

What is COPD?

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a progressive disease that makes it hard to breathe. COPD typically includes two main conditions, emphysema and chronic bronchitis. Most people who have COPD smoke or have previously smoked. Long-term exposure to other lung irritants, such as air pollution, chemical fumes, or dust, may also contribute to COPD.

Quick facts

- COPD is a major cause of disability, and it is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States.
- More than 12 million people are currently diagnosed with COPD. Many more people may have the disease and not even know it.
- COPD develops slowly and symptoms often worsen over time.
- COPD can limit your ability to do routine activities like walking, cooking, or taking care of yourself.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The possible signs and symptoms of COPD include:

- An ongoing cough or a cough that produces large amounts of mucus (often called “smoker’s cough”)
- Shortness of breath, especially with physical activity
- Wheezing
- Chest tightness

COPD has no cure yet. However, treatments and lifestyle changes can help you feel better, stay more active, and slow the progress of the disease. Treatments for COPD may include medicines, vaccines, pulmonary rehabilitation, oxygen therapy, or surgery.

Can COPD be prevented?

Because smoking is the leading cause of COPD, the best way to prevent COPD is to not start smoking or to quit smoking. If you smoke, talk with your doctor about programs and products that can help you quit. Also, try to avoid lung irritants that can contribute to COPD such as secondhand smoke (smoke in the air from other people smoking), air pollution, chemical fumes, and dust.

The Great American Smokeout is **November 18th**. If you smoke or use tobacco, set this date as the first day of your new journey toward a life free of tobacco.

Like many hospitals and health insurance providers, Optima Health offers its members a Tobacco Cessation Program designed to help first-time quitters and those who have tried to quit before. Visit the “Program and Wellness” section of our Web site at optimahealth.com to find out how Optima Health can help you reach a healthier lifestyle. For more information on COPD, visit the National Institutes of Health at nhlbi.nih.gov.