

Definition and incidence

- Includes chronic bronchitis, emphysema and chronic obstructive airways disease
- Chronic inflammation: restricted airflow - lung damage
- Progressive disorder
- 835,000 people diagnosed in the UK
- Estimated that an additional 2 million people are undiagnosed
- Affects more men than women

Causes

- Smoking – 90% of cases caused by smoking
- Genetic link – alpha-1-antitrypsin deficiency
- Workplace irritants (eg. coal dust)
- Air pollution

Risk factors

- Family – smokers with brothers or sisters with COPD
- Smoking - 10 to 25% of smokers develop COPD
- Passive smoking
- Age – especially if always a smoker
- Exposure to pollutants at work

Complications

- Causes 25,000 deaths per year

Signs and symptoms

- Persistent cough
- Phlegm
- Shortness of breath
- Frequent chest infections

Treatment

- No cure – but serious lung damage can be prevented
- Smoking cessation
- 1st line: regular short-acting beta-agonist (blue) or short-acting antimuscarinic bronchodilator
- 2nd line: dependent on spirometry – see BNF
- Aminophylline or theophylline used if patient can't use inhaler
- Indacaterol / roflumilast / mucolytics also used – see BNF
- Long-term oxygen
- Use medication continuously – even if symptoms ease (unless 'prn' dose)
- Influenza and pneumococcal vaccination recommended
- Inhalers to be kept handy at all times
- Check inhaler technique

Lifestyle changes

- Stop smoking
- Avoid passive smoking
- Air pollution can make symptoms worse
- Extreme hot or cold weather can cause breathing problems
- Regular activity improves breathing
 - ideally twice a day; build up to 150 minutes a week eg. 30 minutes activity 5 times a week
- Losing excess weight can improve breathing
- Underweight people have fewer symptoms if they increase their weight
- Healthy diet - variety of foods; increase protein (if underweight), fruit and vegetables

Other support

- British Lung Foundation - www.lunguk.org
- British Thoracic Society - www.brit-thoracic.org.uk
- NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk
- Patient.co.uk - www.patient.co.uk

COPD

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease