

Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux
de la Montérégie-Ouest

Understanding and living better with your condition

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

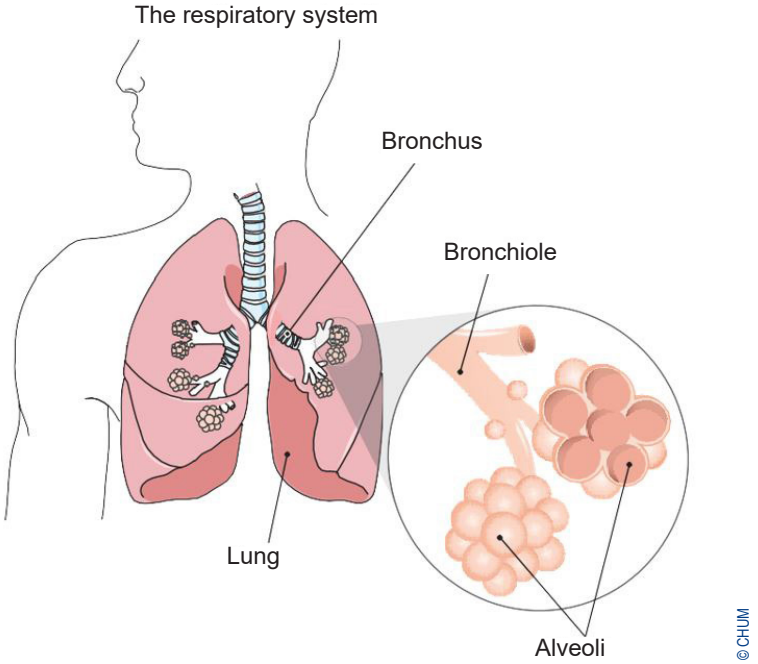
You have been diagnosed with COPD. This health sheet explains what this condition is and how to help manage your symptoms.

What is COPD?

COPD, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, is a combination of two lung conditions:

- **Emphysema**: The alveoli (small air sacs at the end of the lungs) are damaged. Air gets trapped inside the lungs, making it hard to breathe out.
- **Chronic bronchitis**: The bronchi (small airways in the lungs) are often irritated and filled with thick mucus. This can make it hard for air to pass through.

You may have one of these conditions, or both at the same time.



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Most common symptoms

- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Cough (with or without mucus)
- Wheezing
- Weight loss
- Poor sleep
- Trouble breathing when lying down



The doctor confirms COPD based on tests and exams.

What can cause a lung disease like COPD?

- Smoking (the main cause)
- Breathing in other people's smoke (second-hand smoke)
- Living where the air is polluted
- Frequent exposure to chemicals (household products, fumes, etc.)
- Frequent lung infections
- A rare genetic disease (called alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency)

How to reduce symptoms?

Quit smoking

- Tobacco (smoking) damages the lungs and increases mucus
- Tips: avoid smokers, talk to a healthcare professional, and ask for help

Protect yourself against infections

- Vaccines: flu, COVID-19, pneumococcus
- Hygiene: wash your hands often and scrub for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid people who are sick
- Clean your respiratory equipment once a week (for example: mask, nasal tube, or mouthpiece)

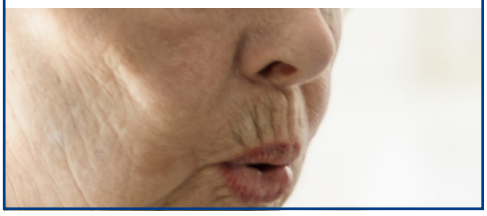
Move and breathe well

- Engage in regular physical activity to help manage your breathing.
- Use your inhalers correctly: ask for guidance if needed.

Important

- Do not force the air out.
- Do not puff out your cheeks.

If you feel dizzy, stop for a few minutes, then start again slowly.



“Pursed lips” breathing techniques

When you have COPD, breathing takes more effort. The pursed lips technique can help you get air out of your lungs more effectively.

How to do it:

1. Breathe in slowly through your nose (count to 2)
2. Purse or pucker your lips like you’re going to whistle or lightly press your teeth together to make an “S” sound
3. Breathe out slowly through your mouth (count to 4)

When to use it:

- During physical activity or exercise
- When you feel short of breath or stressed
- As often as necessary

Things that can worsen your symptoms

Temperature changes

- Humidity, heat, cold, win

What you should do:

- Cover your nose
- Stay inside
- Install an air conditioner
- Avoid strenuous activity
- Keep your rescue inhaler with you



Strong odours and chemicals

- Air out rooms (open windows)
- Wear a mask
- Use odourless products (baking soda, diluted vinegar, dish soap)
- Let your loved ones know that strong odours bother you
- Don’t use sprays, candles, or other products with strong smells

Keep in mind:

- Use as little energy as possible to breathe
- Save enough energy for your important activities
- Take breaks (rest periods) when you do an activity



Managing your energy every day

With COPD, breathing takes more energy than for a healthy person. You need to learn how to save your energy so you can continue doing your daily activities and hobbies, despite shortness of breath.

Plan your week

- Make a list of tasks: cleaning, showering, meals, hobbies, walking, gardening, visiting friends, etc.
- Do the most important tasks first
- Do a few tasks each day; it's less tiring
- Take a rest after each task

Go at your own pace

- Pay attention to your level of fatigue
- Take breaks before you get too short of breath
- Use the pursed lips technique when doing physical activity
- Take rest periods
- Ask for help on days when you don't feel your best

Make life easier

Some things can help you every day and make life easier, for example:

- Sit to do certain tasks (folding clothes, peeling vegetables)
- Break tasks into smaller steps
- Use odourless household products

Stay active

Move every day to keep your muscles strong. This will make your breathing easier.

Do simple exercises, for example, lift light weights or canned foods to strengthen your arms.

When to seek care

See a healthcare professional if:

- Your symptoms last more than 2 days
- You need to use your rescue inhaler several times a day
- You are more out of breath than usual
- Your cough or mucus increases

For questions: 8-1-1
In case of an emergency: 9-1-1

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