

Smoking and COPD

What is chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)?

COPD is the name used for a number of conditions including emphysema and chronic bronchitis in which the airways become inflamed and the air sacs in the lungs are damaged. This causes the airways to become narrower, making it harder to breathe. Emphysema affects the air sacs in the lungs and chronic bronchitis affects the airways.

The main cause of COPD is smoking. The condition usually affects people over the age of 35 who are, or have been, heavy smokers.

People who don't smoke but have long-term severe asthma can develop COPD. It can also be caused by long-term exposure to air pollution, fumes and dust.

How would stopping smoking help my respiratory health?

If you smoke the most important treatment for COPD is to quit. By stopping smoking you will be better able to manage your condition and improve your quality of life.

It will also slow the damage to your lungs and in some cases prevent your condition from getting worse.

What happens after I stop smoking?

- After 20 minutes your heart rate and blood pressure return to normal.
- After eight-24 hours your lungs start to clear out mucus and other smoking debris.
- After 72 hours your breathing is easier and you have more energy. Your sense of smell and taste improve.
- After two-12 weeks your circulation improves and it becomes easier to walk and exercise.
- After three-nine months your lung function increases by up to 10%.
- After five years your risk of suffering a heart attack is cut by half.
- After 10 years your risk of getting lung cancer is half that of a smoker. Your risk of a heart attack is the same as someone who has never smoked.

Stopping smoking is one of the most important things you can do for your health. You are four times more likely to stop with the help of an NHS service (using stop smoking medication and support).

To be referred to your local stop smoking service or to speak to a specialist advisor please contact the Royal Free London stop smoking service on 020 7472 6393 or email rf.stopsmoking@nhs.net.

Alternatively you can call the National Stop Smoking Service on 0300 123 1044.