COPD Symptoms

COPD symptoms can differ for each person. Understanding the symptoms of COPD can help you get diagnosed earlier and start treatment to slow disease progression.



What Are COPD Symptoms?

COPD symptoms are felt, not measured, so you have to share what symptoms you are experiencing, and how often they occur, with your healthcare provider. Not everyone experiences the same COPD symptoms and knowing in which ways COPD is most impacting your life helps your healthcare provider come up with a treatment plan customized for you.

Here are the most common COPD symptoms:

- **Frequent cough (https://lung.org/lung-health-diseases/warning-signs-of-lung-disease/cough)**. The damage and inflammation in your airways produce extra sputum, and your body's natural defense to remove it is to cough.
- **Shortness of breath** (https://lung.org/lung-health-diseases/warning-signs-of-lung-disease/shortness-of-breath). Also called chest tightness or dyspnea, the damage in your lungs makes it difficult to fully exhale old air, so there is less room to inhale fresh air.
- **Coughing up sputum** (https://lung.org/lung-health-diseases/warning-signs-of-lung-

disease/mucus). Also called phlegm or mucus, the damage in your lungs causes an overproduction of sputum that is more difficult to clear out.

- **Wheezing**. Air that is forced through damaged, narrow airways sometimes makes a whistling sound as you breathe.
- **Fatigue**. You may feel drained of energy or generally tired because your body is working much harder to breathe, and you may be experiencing low oxygen levels.

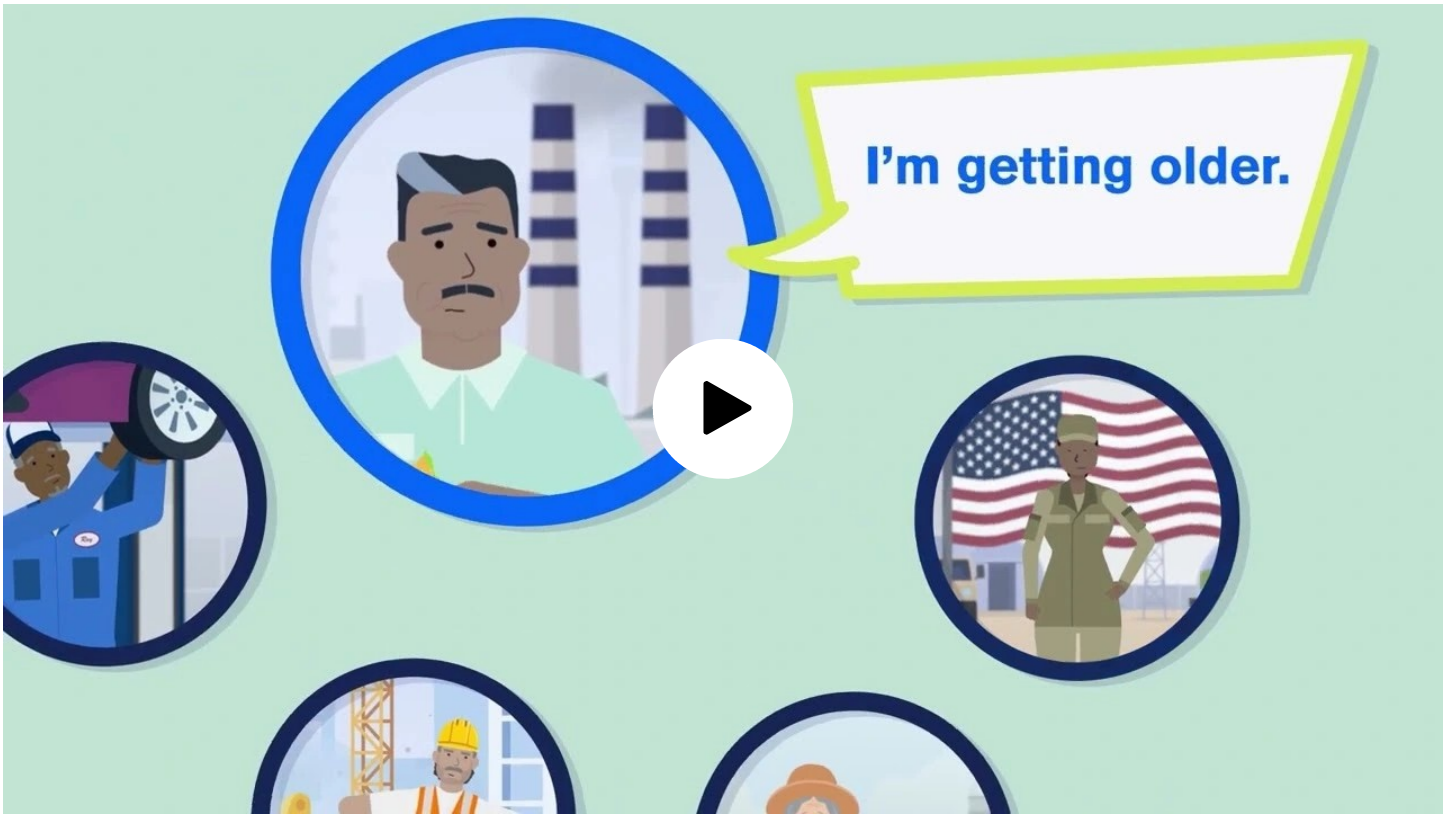


COPD Flare-Ups (Exacerbations)

People with COPD may experience periods when symptoms suddenly worsen. These are called exacerbations or flare-ups. Treatment for flare ups may include increased use of medications, but severe exacerbations can also lead to an emergency room visit or hospitalization.

Are There Early Warning Signs of COPD?

Yes—COPD often begins with subtle symptoms that may be easy to overlook, such as a lingering cough or shortness of breath during routine activities.



(https://www.youtube.com/embed/5ECI9T_WjKY?si=z2kaRdrEfTkV3iOd)

Watch this short video to learn how COPD begins, who is most at risk, and when to talk to a doctor.

WATCH VIDEO ▶ (HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/EMBED/5ECI9T_WJKY?SI=Z2KARDREFTKV3IOD)

Transcript (#transcript) | Watch in Spanish (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYSbaZ_x7Aw&ab_channel=AmericanLungAssociation)

Learn more about early warning signs of COPD (https://lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/symptoms-diagnosis/early-warning-signs) and when to act.

When to See a Healthcare Provider

Talk to your healthcare provider if you experience:

- A cough that lasts more than a few weeks
- Increasing shortness of breath during routine activities
- Frequent respiratory infections
- Symptoms that worsen over time or are worrisome to you



Seek emergency medical care if you have:

- Severe difficulty breathing
- Blue lips or fingernails
- Confusion or extreme fatigue

The sooner you are diagnosed as having COPD (https://lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/symptoms-diagnosis/diagnosing), the quicker you can begin treatment. This means your symptoms will be better managed, you will have fewer flareups and will potentially avoid costly emergency care or hospital visits. Addressing breathing problems earlier will also help you enjoy a better quality of life.

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