Early Warning Signs of COPD

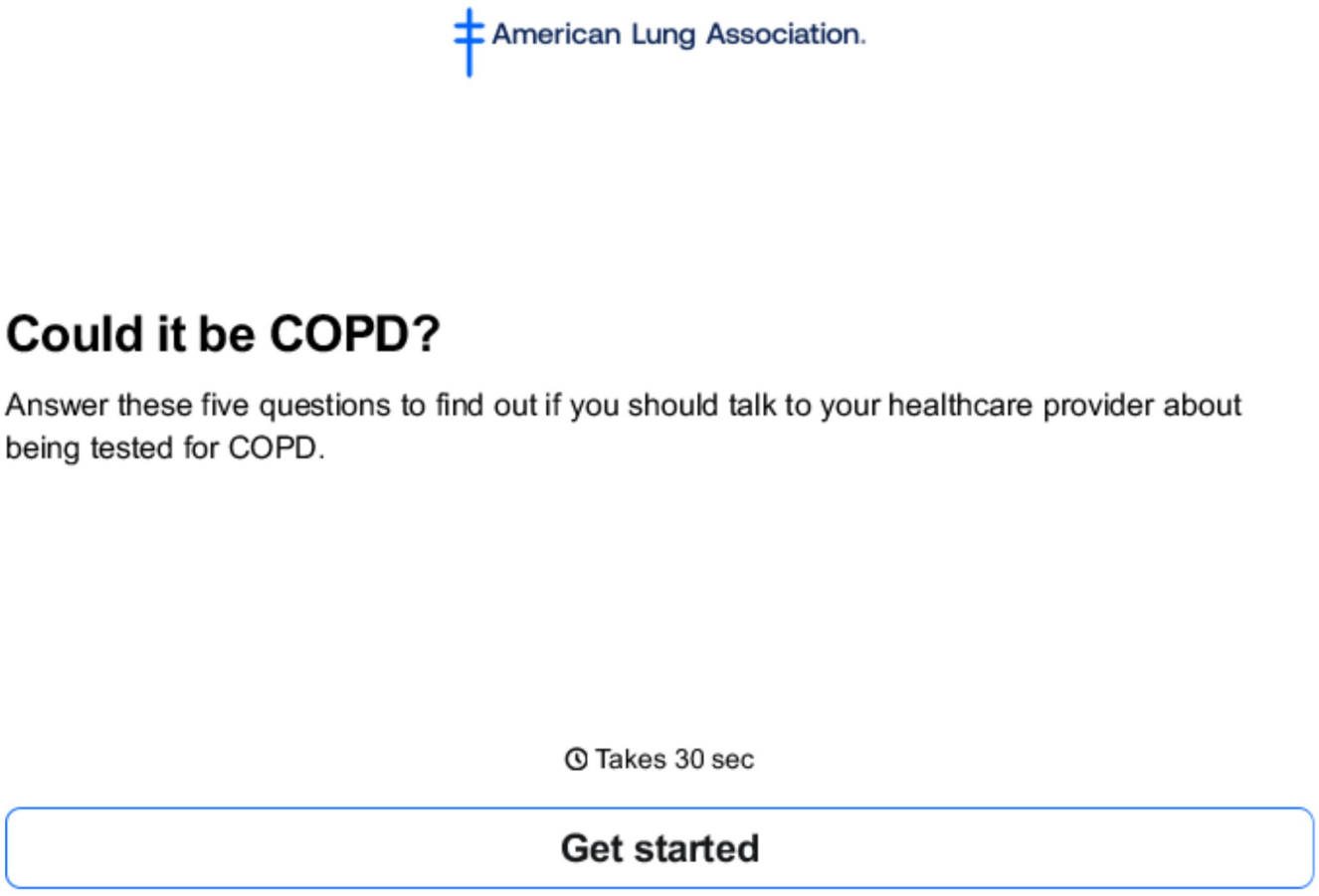
Don't delay talking to your healthcare provider about respiratory symptoms—early detection may improve your quality of life.



More than 16 million people in the United States are diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd) (COPD). Millions more are living with the disease but remain undiagnosed.

The first step toward diagnosis is to talk to your healthcare provider about your symptoms and risk factors. Start the conversation early and do not wait until your symptoms interfere with your everyday activities.

Take the five-question survey.



Are you at risk of COPD?

Anyone can develop COPD; but if you are 40 years old or older and have a history of tobacco use, you may be at a higher risk of developing the disease.

Tobacco use is a leading cause of COPD; however, one in four people who develop COPD never smoked. Other causes and risk factors (https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/what-causes-copd) include exposure to secondhand smoke, air pollution, workplace exposures (https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/symptoms-diagnosis/occupational-copd) and a genetic condition called alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency (AATD).

American Lung Association



Watch on

Hear Mary Lou's story about early warning signs of COPD and getting diagnosed.

Transcript

I was probably in denial, but the first symptoms I noticed was when I would walk with friends, I couldn't walk and talk at the same time. I'd have to slow down or stop and catch my breath. And then when I would get at home, I have to walk a flight of stairs and I'd get part way up, and I'd think, "My husband had to stop halfway up and catch his breath."

And so I went in one day and got his oximeter and put it on, and I got all the way up and I was down in the eighties and I thought, oh, that's not good. And I was getting bronchitis. So I got bronchitis four times in six months. And every time I would go back to the doctor, she would say, "Well, we'll just give you this antibiotic."

And so I wrote down, "I am short of breath. My oximetry goes down in the eighties and I've had bronchitis four times." And she said, "Well, we're going to give you a stronger antibiotic and for a longer time." And I walked out and I thought, "That's not the right answer."

So I went home and I called my husband's pulmonologist. They did all the testing and they came back and that's kind of how I got diagnosed with COPD.

What are the early warning signs of COPD?

Having a chronic cough or shortness of breath (https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/warning-signs-of-lung-disease/shortness-of-breath) is not a normal part of aging. COPD may develop slowly, and as your lung function worsens, it becomes harder to breathe, remain active and continue to do the things you enjoy.

Not everyone has the same COPD symptoms. Common signs and symptoms include:

- shortness of breath
- cough that may bring up sputum (also called mucus (https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/warning-signs-of-lung-disease/mucus)or phlegm)
- wheeze
- chest tightness
- fatigue or tiredness
- reoccurring lung infections like acute bronchitis or pneumonia

Only your healthcare provider can diagnose COPD. A spirometry test (https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-procedures-and-tests/spirometry) will be ordered if your healthcare provider suspects you have COPD. The results of the spirometry test can determine if you have COPD.

Does this sound like you?

"I am shorter of breath because I am getting older."

"I cannot walk as far because I gained weight."

"I am coughing more because I used to smoke."

"I keep getting bronchitis because I am always around my grandkids."



Early detection is key to potentially preventing COPD progression. There is no cure, but treatment, such as medications and pulmonary rehabilitation, can help reduce your symptoms and improve your quality of life.

(https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/treating)



How Can You Reduce Your Risk of COPD?

If you smoke or vape, quit for good.

Protect yourself from infectious lung diseases (https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/infectious-lung-diseases) like the flu and pneumonia

Reduce your exposure to indoor and outdoor air pollution and avoid secondhand smoke.

LEARN MORE ABOUT REDUCING YOUR RISK FOR COPD (HTTPS://WWW.LUNG.ORG/LUNG-HEALTH-DISEASES/LUNG-DISEASE-LOOKUP/COPD/WHAT-CAUSES-COPD)



Have questions? Talk to a COPD Expert.

Our Lung HelpLine is staffed by registered nurses and respiratory therapists ready to help answer your questions about COPD. Connect with us by phone, email or live chat.

(https://www.lung.org/help-support/lung-helpline)

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