



وزارة الصحة العامة
Ministry of Public Health
دولة قطر • State of Qatar



المبادئ الإرشادية السريرية لدولة قطر
NATIONAL CLINICAL GUIDELINES FOR QATAR

Information for Patients & Caregivers

What you need to know about Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

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+ WHAT IS CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD)?

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a long-term disease of the lungs in which the lungs become damaged over many years making it difficult to breathe. The commonest cause of this damage is smoking.

Two types of lung damage can occur in COPD:

Bronchitis: This is when your airways become narrow and inflamed, making it difficult to breathe. Bronchitis caused by COPD lasts for a long time, unlike the bronchitis caused by an infection.

Emphysema: This is when parts of your lungs become less elastic (stretchy) causing air to get trapped in your lungs and difficulty in breathing out air.

Having COPD means you have either bronchitis or emphysema, or both.

The main symptoms of COPD include:

- **Cough** usually the first symptom to develop.
- **Sputum** or mucus.
- **Difficulty in breathing.**
- **Wheezing.**

These symptoms will gradually get worse over the years if you continue to smoke. A sudden worsening of your symptoms may also occur especially if you develop a lung infection.

If you have any of these symptoms, you should see a doctor for the right diagnosis and treatment.

There is no cure for COPD, but the symptoms can be controlled with the right treatment.

+ WHAT CAUSES COPD?

Apart from smoking, other factors that can increase your risk of developing COPD include:

- **Gender.** COPD is more common in men than in women.
- **Occupations** with long-term exposure to dust or fumes and chemical agents.
- **Increasing age.** COPD mainly affects people over the age of 40.
- **Genetic problems.** Some people have an inherited risk of having COPD.
- **Air pollution** from burning of wood, coal, or incense.

+ WHEN SHOULD I SEE A DOCTOR?

If you smoke tobacco and have any of the following symptoms, you should see a primary care doctor as soon as possible:

- **Cough with sputum** that has gradually become more persistent.
- **Difficulty with breathing.**

The following symptoms suggest a chest infection in a person who already has COPD. If you have these, you should see a doctor immediately:

- **Wheezing with cough and breathlessness** that has become worse than usual.
- **Coughing more sputum than usual and sputum turning yellow or green.**
- **Symptoms not improved within 48 hours of starting antibiotics.**
- **Chest pain and coughing up blood.** These symptoms are not common in COPD, but you can have slightly blood-streaked sputum.

+ HOW IS COPD DIAGNOSED?

To make a diagnosis of COPD your doctor will ask questions about your symptoms and check your chest for signs of COPD. If your symptoms and signs suggest COPD, your doctor may order some tests to confirm the diagnosis.

The test that is commonly ordered to confirm the diagnosis of COPD is called **spirometry**. This test measures how much air you can blow out into a machine. Other tests that your doctor may order, depending on your condition, include:

- **Chest X-ray** to help exclude other serious conditions.
- **A blood test** to make sure you do not have low blood levels (anaemia) as this can also lead to breathlessness.



+ WHAT YOUR DOCTOR WILL DO

After confirming the diagnosis of COPD, your doctor will start treatment right away.

Stopping smoking is the most important treatment for COPD. No other treatment may be needed if the disease is in the early stages and your symptoms are mild. Your doctor may prescribe some medicines given in devices called inhalers.

If your COPD is very serious or you have frequent infections or an existing condition that compromises your immunity, such as diabetes, your doctor may refer you to a hospital for specialist treatment and admission.

+ MEDICINES USED TO TREAT COPD

One or more of the following medicines may be prescribed. The aim is to ease symptoms and prevent flare-ups of symptoms.

Inhalers: Most people with COPD are treated with inhalers. The inhaler delivers a small dose of medicine directly to the lungs. There are different inhaler devices, but your doctor will advise on which one is ideal for you.

Medicines given for COPD can be classified into 4 groups:

- **Reliever inhalers** contain medicine which helps to relax your airways and relieve breathing problems.
- **Preventer inhalers** contain steroids and are used with reliever inhalers for treating more severe COPD or regular flare-ups of symptoms.
- **Bronchodilator tablets or injections.** Sometimes used for treatment, especially in hospitals.
- **Antibiotics.** These are prescribed if you have a chest infection.

Other treatments while in hospital, include:

- **Nebulisers** are devices that turn the bronchodilator medicines into vapour. You breathe this in with a face mask or a mouthpiece. They are used for people who are very tired with their breathing.
- **BiPAP or CPAP treatment.** Sometimes a special tabletop device fitted with tubing and a mask is used to help your breathing. This device delivers pressurised air which provides relief to people with severe symptoms.

+ WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOURSELF

You can decrease the symptoms of COPD or reduce the number of flare-ups you typically experience by doing the following:

- **Stop smoking.**
- **Ensure your inhaler is always with you.**
- **Follow the treatment plan** given by the doctor and take your medicine as directed.
- **Lose some weight.** Obesity can make breathlessness worse. If you are overweight, try to see a dietitian for advice on healthy eating and weight loss.
- **Ensure you are up to date with your vaccinations** as advised or recommended by your doctor.
- **Try to do some regular exercise.** This will help improve your breathing and ease symptoms.



ALWAYS MAKE SURE YOUR DOCTOR KNOWS ALL THE MEDICINE YOU ARE TAKING AND WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAVE ANY ALLERGIES.

+ FOLLOW UP

If you have COPD, you need to see your doctor regularly for a check-up or annual review.

You can discuss your medication and your doctor might assess how you use your inhaler.

Regular check-ups allow monitoring of the severity of your COPD and give an opportunity for health counselling about how you can stop smoking or control your weight.



+ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information on Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease can be found in the National Clinical Guideline published by The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) Qatar.

The guideline is available for public on MOPH website:

www.moph.gov.qa