



Health Awareness

COPD: What You Should Know About This Disease

(NAPSA)—Many people quit smoking each year in a move to improve their health. Few, however, take the next logical step after quitting—visiting their doctor for a lung function test.

While quitting smoking decreases your risk of illness, it's important to find out how much damage may have already been done by checking for a variety of lung diseases including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diagnosed in more than 11 million adults. It is the fourth leading cause of death and claims the lives of more than 120,000 Americans annually.

COPD is a term referring to a large group of lung diseases characterized by obstruction to airflow that interferes with normal breathing. Emphysema and chronic bronchitis are the most important conditions that compose COPD and you can have them at the same time.

COPD can have a variety of causes from occupational hazards to air pollution. But the most common cause is smoking and accounts for 80-90 percent of deaths from COPD. The American Lung Association offers the following advice to current and ex-smokers to help you learn more about COPD and quit smoking.

- Learn to recognize the symptoms of COPD. Symptoms include



Visit your doctor for a lung function test to see if you suffer from COPD.

chronic cough, shortness of breath, a greater effort to breathe, increased mucus production and frequent clearing of the throat.

- Discuss these symptoms with your doctor. "Many smokers or ex-smokers may harbor feelings of guilt, shame or fear and will often ignore or misinterpret the signs of COPD," said Dr. Norman Edelman, medical consultant for the American Lung Association and a professor of medicine at SUNY Stony Brook University. "That said, family and friend support can go a long way in encouraging someone to consult with their physician and ask to see a pulmonologist. Early diagnosis can open the door to treatment options that can improve the quality of life."

- The American Lung Association and ALTANA Pharma US have developed free "Hungry for Air: Care. Share. Commit." care packages designed to encourage people to reach out to family and friends who they suspect may have symptoms of COPD and ask them to request a lung function test from their doctor. Care packages include a 10-minute calling card, a COPD informational card and a plastic drinking straw to simulate the difficulty of breathing when suffering from COPD. They are available by calling 1-877-COPD-INFO or by visiting www.lungusa.org.

- Get help to quit smoking. Join a stop-smoking program such as Freedom From Smoking® from the American Lung Association. This online program gives ideas and peer support to help you quit for good.

Other risk factors of COPD include heredity and a history of childhood respiratory infections. "Researchers are identifying certain genetic traits that make individuals more likely to develop the disease," said Dr. Edelman. "If you have a history of COPD in your family, you should run, not walk to your doctor and ask for a lung function test."

For more information about quitting smoking and COPD, go to www.lungusa.org.