



**Emphysema** is a chronic lung condition. With emphysema, the air sacs in the lungs are destroyed. The lungs lose their ability to stretch. This makes it harder to get air in and out of the lungs.

When emphysema occurs with **chronic bronchitis** (see at [www.HealthyLearn.com](http://www.HealthyLearn.com)), it is called **chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)**.

Symptoms of COPD are:

- Coughing that produces large amounts of mucus.
- Shortness of breath.
- Wheezing.
- Chest tightness.

Symptoms worsen over time. COPD has no cure yet. The goals of treatment are to help you feel better, stay more active, and slow the progress of the disease. Treatment includes:

- Stopping smoking.
- Avoiding lung irritants.
- Taking medications that make breathing easier.
- Preventing and treating respiratory infections.

# Emphysema

## Signs & Symptoms

Emphysema takes years to develop. When symptoms occur, they include:

- Cough with mucus.
- Shortness of breath on exertion. This gets worse over time.
- Wheezing.
- Chest tightness.
- Slight body build with marked weight loss and a rounded chest that doesn't appear to expand when breathing in.

## Causes

- Smoking. This causes as much as 90% of cases. Most people with emphysema are cigarette smokers aged 50 or older.
- A genetic problem with a certain protein that protects the lungs from damage.
- Repeated lung infections.
- **Chronic bronchitis.** (See at [www.HealthyLearn.com](http://www.HealthyLearn.com).)
- Heavy exposure to air pollution.
- Years of exposure to chemical fumes, vapors, and dusts. This is usually linked to certain jobs.



*Emphysema is called "the smoker's disease."*



## Emphysema, Continued

### Treatment

- A program, medication, and/or nicotine replacement to stop smoking.
- Physical therapy to loosen mucus in the lungs for chronic bronchitis.
- Medicines, such as bronchodilators, corticosteroids, and antibiotics.
- Flu and pneumonia vaccines.
- Surgery that removes the most severely diseased parts of the lung. A lung transplant may be needed for some persons with very severe disease.

Emphysema can't be reversed. By the time it is found, 50% to 70% of lung tissue may already be destroyed. Prevention is the only way to avoid permanent damage.

### Questions to Ask

With emphysema, do you have any of these problems?

- Blue or purple-colored lips or fingertips.
- Severe shortness of breath or you can't say 4 or 5 words between breaths.
- Coughing up true red blood.

NO

With emphysema, do your legs and ankles swell more than usual, do you have a fever, or does your cough get worse?

NO

*Flowchart continued in next column*

Do you have **signs and symptoms of emphysema** listed on previous page?

YES



### Self-Care / Prevention

- Don't smoke. If you smoke, quit. Avoid secondhand smoke.
- Limit exposure to air pollution and lung irritants. Follow safety measures when working with materials that can irritate your lungs.
- Use a cool-mist vaporizer indoors.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid dust, fumes, pollutants, etc.
- Do breathing exercises as advised by your doctor.
- Exercise daily as prescribed by your doctor or exercise therapist.



#### Get more information from:

American Lung Association  
800.LUNG.USA (586.4872)  
[www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)

National Cancer Institute's Smoking Quitline  
877.44U.QUIT (448.7848)

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute  
[www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

Smokefree.Gov  
800.QUIT.NOW (748.8669)  
[www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov)