COPD and Smoking

What is COPD?

"COPD" stands for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. It refers to a group of diseases – including emphysema and chronic bronchitis – that affect the lungs and make it hard to breathe. It tends to get worse over the years. Lungs become damaged and you may need oxygen to help you breathe. In the United States, smoking is the main reason for developing COPD. Smoking is also the main reason that the disease gets worse.

Symptoms of COPD include:
- Regular coughing (sometimes called "smoker's cough")
- Extra mucus with coughing
- Getting a lot of lung infections
- Shortness of breath (especially with physical activity)
- Wheezing
- Blue or gray lips and/or fingernails (a sign of low oxygen levels in your blood)
- Swelling in the feet and ankles
- Weight loss

How Does Smoking Affect COPD?

Smoking is the main cause of COPD. The smoke from your own cigarettes, or from someone else's (second hand smoke), damages lungs. Over time, the damage gets worse and you develop symptoms like coughing, wheezing and trouble breathing. Eventually, you might be diagnosed with COPD.

If you get sick with COPD and keep smoking, the disease will get worse.

If you need an oxygen tank to help you breathe and you keep smoking, you put yourself in danger. Smoking anywhere near oxygen, even in the same room, can lead to fire, explosions and burns.

Smoking is the reason for as many as 8 out of 10 COPD-related deaths.

Quitting smoking is the single most important step you can take to reduce the risk of developing COPD and to slow the progress of the disease.

When You Stop Smoking

- You will slow down the progression of your illness
- Your breathing may get easier and you may cough less and make less mucus
- You may not need extra oxygen to breathe
- Your quality of life can improve

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