**Get Tested for COPD: Your Lungs Will Thank You**

If you’re often short of breath during everyday activities, your chest feels tight, or you cough a lot, you may be chalking it up to getting older, having allergies, or being a smoker (now or in the past). Fortunately, there’s a way to know whether something more may be at play. Consider getting a lung function test to find out if you have a serious condition called chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD. Knowing the cause of your cough and breathing problems will not only help you manage your symptoms—it’ll help you feel better, too.

COPD includes two main conditions—emphysema and chronic bronchitis. It’s usually caused by cigarette smoking or breathing in other irritants, such as dusts or chemical fumes. In a small fraction of people, a genetic condition called alpha-1 antitrypsin (AAT) deficiency plays a role in causing COPD. More than 16 million Americans have been diagnosed with COPD, and millions more have it but don’t know it, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI).

COPD doesn’t have a cure at the moment, but if you seek advice from a health care provider and get diagnosed early, you can slow down this progressive disease. During your appointment, your provider will talk to you about your symptoms and your medical history, then listen to your breathing. He or she also may recommend one or more tests to help diagnose COPD.

**Spirometry: A Lung Function Test**

The main test for COPD is called spirometry. During this test, a technician at your health care provider’s office will ask you to sit down and put a clip on your nose, so you can breathe only through your mouth. The technician will then ask you to put your mouth around a mouthpiece, which looks like the mouthpiece on a snorkel. It’s connected to a machine that measures how well you breathe. The technician will ask you to take in a deep breath, then blow all of your air out as fast as you can. You’ll repeat that a few times. It’s painless, but it does take some effort.

Your provider will use the test results to determine how healthy your lungs are, if you have COPD and how serious it is, or if asthma or other conditions are causing your symptoms. Spirometry can also help your provider know if you have COPD before you even have symptoms, so if you’re concerned about your lung health, consider getting a spirometry test.

**Ask for a lung function test if you**:

* Are over age 40
* Are or were a smoker
* Feel out of breath often
* Bring up a lot of mucus when you cough
* Have already been diagnosed with a lung disease
* Have AAT deficiency
* Are concerned about your lung health

Another factor to consider when assessing your lung health is COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus that has spread throughout the world. Unlike COPD, COVID-19 causes abrupt coughing and trouble breathing, so your health care provider may want to test you for it.

If you have a chronic lung disease, such as COPD, and get infected with COVID-19, you are at higher risk of getting very sick. COVID-19 can affect your respiratory tract (nose, throat, lungs), and possibly lead to pneumonia and acute respiratory disease. For more information on COVID-19, visit [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/).

NHLBI’s *Learn More Breathe Better®* program provides free educational resources about COPD, videos on spirometry, and more. Find them at [copd.nhlbi.nih.gov](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/education-and-awareness/copd-learn-more-breathe-better).