

COPD stands for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. This includes conditions such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis and is most often the result of long-term tobacco use. There are some genetic causes of COPD as well but these occur rarely. Most often, long term exposure to cigarette smoke leads to inflammation in the lungs and eventually damage to the lung airways as well as air sacks called alveoli. This damage is usually progressive with time and not reversible. The rate of damage can be slowed significantly by stopping smoking. Patients with COPD often experience shortness of breath that gradually worsens with time. Patients may also have fatigue, cough, sputum production, wheezing, chest tightness and exercise intolerance. Patients with COPD are at increased risk for things like infection/pneumonia and lung cancer. COPD is diagnosed by a procedure called pulmonary function testing, which measures how much air goes in and out of the lungs and how fast. While there is not cure for COPD, there are treatments available, which most often include inhaled medications. These medications help people with COPD feel better, but do not reverse the damage that has already been done to the lungs. Some patients with COPD will need oxygen therapy in addition to inhaled medications. The most important cornerstone in treatment of COPD is smoking cessation. Smoking cessation will slow the rate of decline in lung function and is one of the only things that can be done to allow patients with COPD to live longer.