

WHAT IS COPD?

COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) is a lung disease that encompasses two main respiratory conditions: chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Both conditions cause a progressive obstruction of the airways, limiting airflow and reducing breathing capacity. This obstruction is only partially reversible. A person may be affected by one or both conditions simultaneously.

According to INESSS
(Institut national d'excellence
en santé et en services sociaux),

in Quebec,
approximately
10% of people aged
35 and older have
been diagnosed
with chronic
obstructive
pulmonary
disease (COPD).

DO YOU HAVE COPD?

COPD is a respiratory disease that develops slowly over time. The first signs may include a persistent cough or shortness of breath during physical activity. An early diagnosis can lead to better disease management and a better quality of life.

TAKE A MOMENT: COMPLETE THE COPD SCREENING TEST!

1. Do you cough regularly?
2. Do you regularly cough up phlegm or mucus?
3. Do you feel short of breath even during simple daily tasks?
4. Do you wheeze during physical activity or at night?
5. Have you experienced multiple respiratory infections over the past few years?

If you answered YES to at least 2 questions, ask your doctor for a medical evaluation to determine whether you have COPD.

To confirm a COPD diagnosis, your doctor must order a spirometry test — a quick and simple test that measures how well your lungs are functioning.

CHRONIC BRONCHITIS

Chronic bronchitis is characterized by persistent inflammation of the airways and excessive mucus production, which hinder the flow of air to the lungs. When the obstruction becomes significant, the lungs cannot fully empty, and air becomes trapped in the air sacs (alveoli). Chronic bronchitis is primarily defined by a productive cough present for at least three consecutive months, over two successive years.

Result: People with chronic bronchitis experience coughing, mucus production, and shortness of breath during exercise or daily activities.

EMPHYSEMA

Emphysema affects the air sacs (alveoli) in the lungs. Under normal conditions, alveoli act like small elastic balloons — they expand when you inhale and deflate when you exhale. In a person with emphysema, the alveolar walls are damaged and destroyed, causing the air sacs to enlarge. Air becomes trapped inside the damaged sacs, making breathing more difficult. Oxygen and CO₂ exchange is also reduced, lowering the amount of oxygen available in the body. The destruction of lung tissue also causes the lungs to lose their elasticity, leading to a progressive intolerance to physical exertion.

In summary: People with emphysema experience shortness of breath during exercise or daily activities.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF COPD

People with COPD typically experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Shortness of breath (dyspnea), ranging from breathlessness during exertion to difficulty getting dressed;
- Chronic cough (particularly in chronic bronchitis);
- Mucus or sputum production (particularly in chronic bronchitis);
- More frequent respiratory infections (influenza, pneumonia) and longer recovery time;
- Fatigue;
- Unexplained weight loss;
- Reduced ability to carry out daily activities;
- Wheezing;
- Chest tightness.

Shortness of breath
Chronic cough
Mucus
respiratory infections
symptoms
Weight loss
Reduced ability
wheezing
Chest tightness

COPD doubles
the risk of lung
cancer, and
multiplies it by
up to **2.5** for
severe forms,
independently
of smoking.

CAUSES OF COPD

In 90% of cases, COPD is linked to cigarette smoking. Other possible risk factors include:

- Alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency, a rare hereditary disorder that causes early-onset emphysema and severe airflow obstruction;
- Exposure to secondhand smoke;
- Air pollution (dust and chemical fumes);
- Repeated lung infections during childhood.