

WHAT IS COPD?

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a slowly progressive life threatening lung disease that is characterised by a persistent blockage of airflow from the lungs interfering with normal breathing.

Chronic – It won't go away
Obstructive – Partly blocked
Pulmonary – In the lungs
Disease – Sickness

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

The most common symptoms of COPD are breathlessness, abnormal sputum production (a mix of saliva and mucus in the airway), and a chronic cough. Daily activities, such as walking up a short flight of stairs or even showering can become very difficult as the condition gradually worsens.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Most people with COPD are not diagnosed until the disease is well advanced. COPD is confirmed by a simple diagnostic test called "spirometry" that measures how much air a person can inhale and exhale, and how fast air can move into and out of the lungs. Because COPD develops slowly, it is frequently diagnosed in people aged 40 or older.

HOW IS IT MANAGED/TREATED?

COPD is not curable however it is treatable to help slow down further disease progression. Various forms of treatment can help control its symptoms and increase quality of life for people with the illness. Key recommendations for treatment and management include:

1. Quitting Smoking – The single most effective intervention in preventing further damage to the lungs
2. Bronchodilator therapy – Opens airways to achieve maximal symptom control.
3. Inhaled Corticosteroids – May benefit some patients with more advanced COPD in prevention of flare ups.
4. Regular exercise – To avoid deconditioning (Enrolment in a supervised pulmonary rehabilitation program is strongly recommended).
5. Supplemental oxygen therapy – May benefit patients who have critically low oxygen levels in their blood to help prolong life.
6. Surgery – reserved for consideration in patients with advanced stages of the disease.