

HealthyActions

Achieving Your Goals for Healthy Living



All About Your Lungs

Smoking: It's Never Too Late to Stop

If you smoke, quitting is the best thing you can do for your health. Here's what will happen when you quit¹:

- **Within 20 minutes:** Your heart rate drops.
- **Within 2 weeks to 3 months:** Your chances of having a heart attack drop. Your lungs work better.
- **Within 1 to 9 months:** You cough less. You are short of breath less often.
- **After 5 years:** Your chances of having a stroke are the same as for people who never smoked.

What Can Cause Breathing Problems?

As you age, you are more likely to get infections and diseases. Breathing illnesses are a leading cause of death in older adults.² Here are some common infections in the lungs and breathing illnesses:

Flu

- **Caused by:** Contact with germs from people who have the flu.
- **Symptoms:** Fever, headache, tiredness, cough, sore throat, stuffy nose, body aches.
- **Treatment:** Get plenty of rest. Drink lots of liquids. Take a medicine such as acetaminophen to reduce fever and body aches.

Pneumonia (nuh-moan-yuh)

- **Caused by:** Infections, such as the flu.
- **Symptoms:** Cough with green or yellow mucus, fever, chills, chest pain, trouble breathing.
- **Treatment:** See your doctor right away. Take medicines as your doctor tells you to. Get plenty of rest. Drink lots of liquids.

Asthma (az-muh)

- **Caused by:** Reactions to smoke, pollen, dust, air pollution, strong fumes, other things.
- **Symptoms:** Wheezing, cough, trouble breathing, chest tightness.
- **Treatment:** See your doctor. Take medicines as your doctor tells you to. Avoid things that cause your asthma.

Chronic Obstructive (ub-struck-tiv) Pulmonary (pull-mun-airy) Disease (COPD)

- **Caused by:** Smoking. Sometimes caused by breathing in dust, fumes, or air pollution.
- **Symptoms:** Constant cough, trouble breathing when active, lots of mucus, wheezing.
- **Treatment:** See your doctor. Take medicines as your doctor tells you to. Don't smoke.



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Stop-Smoking Help— Day or Night

You can call a national stop-smoking quitline to get help. The number is toll-free:
1-800-784-8669.³



Checklist to Prevent and Manage Breathing Problems

- See your doctor for a complete check-up**, even if you feel fine. See your doctor anytime you have breathing problems. Follow your doctor's advice to manage your symptoms.
- Stop smoking**. Ask your doctor about medicines to help you stop smoking. Ask about counseling or therapy.
- Avoid breathing in other things that can harm your lungs**, such as:
 - Fumes from chemicals, cooking stoves or heaters.
 - Dust.
 - Air pollution.
 - Second-hand smoke.
- Take your medicines the way your doctor tells you to**. Some medicines relax the muscles around your airways. Some medicines keep your airways from swelling. Some medicines fight infections. Your medicines will make it easier for you to breathe.
- Get vaccines**. Get a flu shot every year in the fall. Get a pneumonia vaccine if you haven't already gotten one. (Ask your doctor if you need a booster.)
- Take other steps to avoid breathing infections**. Wash your hands often. Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. Stay away from people who are sick.
- Strengthen your body**. Exercise regularly. Do activities you enjoy, such as walking or gardening. If you have breathing problems, do breathing exercises. Eat healthy foods to be at a healthy weight.
- Know when to get emergency help**. Get help right away if:
 - Walking or talking is much harder than usual.
 - Your heartbeat or pulse is very fast or unusual.
 - Your lips or fingernails are gray or blue.
 - Your breathing is fast and hard.
 - Your medicine does not help for very long, or it does not help at all.

References

1. CDC. "2004 Surgeon General's Report: Poster: Within 20 Minutes of Quitting." http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_2004/posters/20mins.htm#. Accessed July 1, 2007.
2. Gorina Y, Hoyert D, Lentzner H, Goulding M. Trends in Causes of Death among Older Persons in the United States. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/ahcd/agingtrends/06olderpersons.pdf>. Accessed July 3, 2007.
3. National Network of Tobacco Cessation Quitlines. Available at: http://smokefree.gov/pop_800.html. Accessed June 26, 2007.

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