

COPD AND DIABETES: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a group of chronic lung diseases, including emphysema and bronchitis, that block airflow in the lungs. COPD affects millions of people across the country and is currently the sixth leading cause of death. People living with COPD often have other health challenges at the same time, or comorbidities.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a common comorbidity for people living with COPD and research suggests that up to 37% of patients with COPD may also have diabetes. Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects how the body processes food into energy. When a person eats, their body processes the food into sugar which is then released into the bloodstream. When blood sugar increases, the pancreas is triggered to release insulin, which helps turn the sugar into energy. If a person is living with diabetes, their body can't make enough insulin or use it like it's meant to be. There are two main types of diabetes, Type 1 and Type 2.

Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune reaction where the body can't make insulin. This type of diabetes is often diagnosed early in childhood and requires a person to take daily doses of insulin. People who have Type 2 diabetes aren't able to use insulin properly and have a difficult time keeping blood sugar at normal levels. As with COPD, Type 2 diabetes is typically diagnosed later in life.



How does diabetes affect COPD?

COPD and diabetes affect a person's quality of life and make care management difficult when they are diagnosed with both conditions. A common effect from diabetes is inflammation. People with COPD who are also diagnosed with diabetes are more likely to have impaired lung function, increased length of stay in hospitals, and in-hospital mortality. Scientists believe that hyperglycemia causes an inflammatory response, which leads to reduced lung function. Another health effect people living with COPD and diabetes should be aware of is the increased vulnerability to bacterial infection.

How can diabetes and COPD be managed?

Both diabetes and COPD are chronic conditions that do not have a cure. However, they can be managed through medications and lifestyle changes. Speak with your healthcare provider about what management techniques are right for you. Smoking increases the risk of diabetes, so quitting can be beneficial for both conditions. Learn more about quitting smoking by visiting RHA's website resphhealth.org/quitsmoking. Taking medications according to the prescribing healthcare provider can reduce the chance of flare ups or serious complications that may lead to a hospitalization.

References

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