INSPIRATION COPD NEWSLETTER

Respiratory Health Association’s newsletter for people living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), their families, and caregivers.

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WHAT IS COPD?
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a combination of lung damage and mucus production that makes it hard to breathe. COPD is used to describe emphysema, chronic bronchitis, or a combination of the two. Symptoms include cough, shortness of breath, wheezing, and chest tightness.

COPD & Women: What You Need to Know
Millions of people across the country are living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). It is currently the sixth leading cause of death and a major cause of disability.

THE CURRENT PREVALENCE OF COPD AMONG ALL WOMEN IS 5.9% AND INCREASES TO OVER 9% AMONG WOMEN AGES 45 AND OLDER

While the death rate among men has decreased over the last several years, the death rate among women has remained fairly constant.

While COPD does affect both men and women, it affects women differently. Women with COPD are more likely to experience serious COPD symptoms and flare-ups than men. Women also have a greater likelihood of experiencing shortness of breath and physical limitations from their COPD.

The leading cause of COPD among men and women is tobacco use. Women juggle many roles and responsibilities and often turn to smoking for stress relief. Although the rate of
Keep up to date on vaccinations this fall & winter

People living with COPD are more susceptible to viral infections. This includes the flu, COVID-19, whooping cough, and pneumonia. Patients with COPD are more likely to experience airway swelling which can lead to mucus build up and cause severe infection and complications.

Vaccinations are the best protection against these infections. As of 2022, the Center for Disease Control recommends that patients with COPD get several vaccinations (not all of these are yearly):

- A yearly *flu shot*,
- A *Tdap* (tetanus, diphtheria, and whooping cough) vaccine every ten years,
- *Pneumococcal* (based on the recommendation of your healthcare provider),
- *Zoster* (shingles) (given once in two doses), and
- The updated *COVID-19* vaccinations.

These vaccinations are proven to reduce hospitalization rates for patients with COPD. In one study, **THE FLU SHOT REDUCED HOSPITALIZATION OF COPD PATIENTS BY 38%**.

COVID-19 is another important vaccination to protect yourself and others. In March of 2022, a study found COVID-19 to be twice as likely to be fatal in people with COPD than those without. The COVID-19 vaccinations are a safe and effective way to prevent infection. To learn more about the updated COVID-19 vaccinations, visit [resphealth.org/lung-disease-covid-vaccine/](http://resphealth.org/lung-disease-covid-vaccine/).

Reach out to your healthcare provider or local pharmacies and clinics to schedule your recommended vaccinations.
COPD and Women: What You Need to Know (Continued)

current women smokers continues to decrease, women are still 31% less likely to quit smoking than men. While the reasons behind this may be unknown, it highlights an important distinction between men and women living with lung disease.

Women often serve as the chief medical officers for their households and they make nearly 80% of the medical decisions for their families. Despite their involvement in the healthcare needs of their families, women often ignore or sideline their own healthcare needs. It’s important, now more than ever, to make appointments with your healthcare providers and share your concerns.

It’s important to be open and honest when discussing symptoms, concerns, and medical history so your healthcare provider can properly assess your health.

Managing Your COPD

When patients are formally diagnosed with COPD, they are often prescribed three drugs: bronchodilators, inhaled steroids, and oral steroids. It is also important to include non-pharmacologic interventions, such as smoking cessation, in the management plan.

Quitting smoking, even after smoking for many years, yields important health benefits as soon as you quit, and even if you have been diagnosed with COPD. Quitting smoking improves the amount of air a person can force out of their lungs. That can reduce COPD symptoms and the risk of a COPD flare-up or exacerbation. Patients can ask their providers for information on how to start their journey towards a smoke-free life.

Other non-pharmacological interventions include pulmonary rehabilitation and physical activity. Pulmonary rehabilitation helps control COPD symptoms through exercise, education, and support.

People living with COPD can learn different breathing techniques to avoid breathlessness, signs of flare-ups, and conserve energy. Pulmonary rehabilitation may also include psychological counseling to maintain good mental health and manage stress and anxiety. These therapies are often affordable and accessible in your community.

While medications are effective in reducing symptoms, it is essential to incorporate non-pharmacological therapies into a management plan too.

Learn more about RHA’s quit smoking resources online at resphealth.org/quitsmoking.
For more information contact Erica Salem at 312-628-0235 or esalem@resphealth.org.

This newsletter is not intended to provide specific medical advice, but general information for people living with COPD and their caregivers. If you think you may have COPD, talk to your healthcare provider.

If you would like to receive more information for people living with COPD, please visit resphealth.org/copd.

Inspiration is edited by Khalilah Gates, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Medical Education, Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. We thank her for her assistance.

CONTACT RESPIRATORY HEALTH ASSOCIATION

If you would like to have upcoming issues of our free Inspiration newsletter delivered to your home, please contact Erica Salem at 312-628-0235 or esalem@resphealth.org.

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Development Department
Respiratory Health Association
1440 W Washington Blvd
Chicago, IL 60607

This edition of Inspiration is dedicated to the memory of Richard Africk, father of RHA’s President and CEO. Richard and his wife, Diane, were the inspiration behind RHA’s COPD Caregiver’s Toolkit and support resources.