

Title: Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and You

Author: Jonathan Williams

Date: January 9, 2008

Key words: Patient Education Tool, COPD

Abstract:

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a common disease amongst smokers with a 60 or more pack-year history of smoking. This document was created to help patients understand some basic information about the disease and the basics of medical treatment for this disease.

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Primary Care Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up to date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.

## Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and You

This pamphlet describes some of the medicines you might take to help you breathe better.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is also sometimes called *emphysema*.

Many people with COPD feel **short of breath**, particularly with exercise or exertion. Some will also have difficulty breathing out, and hear **wheezing**.

It is most often the result of **lung damage** caused by smoking. This disease is not curable, but **its symptoms can be decreased** with medicines.

Most of the medicines that are helpful for COPD are taken with an inhaler. These include medicines that relax the muscles in the airways of your lungs.

Some of these medicines include albuterol (Proventil, Ventolin), ipratropium (Atrovent), tiotropium (Spiriva), salmeterol (Serevent).

Some medicines are steroids, which work by decreasing inflammation in the airways of the lungs.

Some of these medicines include Advair, Flovent, Aerobid, Medrol, Azmacort .

Sometimes, people with COPD can have feel like their breathing is worse than usual and feel very uncomfortable or worried. This is called a ***COPD exacerbation***. If this happens to you, see your primary doctor or go to the emergency room.

**Many things can cause this to occur**, including infection, allergies, or something as simple as a change in the weather.

You may need to receive higher dose of your normal medicines or stronger medicines through an IV.

If you have a COPD exacerbation, it is often necessary to take **oral steroid medicines** (from 7 days to 14 days) for a short period of time. This **reduces the swelling** and inflammation in the airways of the lung.

This treatment will help your breathing return to its usual state after 1 to 2 weeks.

It is important to **take care of your breathing**. Avoid situations where your breathing is made worse.

**Stopping smoking will slow worsening of your breathing.**

Long-term use of oral steroid medicines may be necessary with repeated flare-ups of COPD. Prolonged exposure to steroids has significant side effects, and can cause weakening of the bones and weight gain, as well as problems with sugar levels for diabetic patients.