

COPD Awareness Month: There is never a better time to focus on our lung health



The month of November is observed as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) Awareness Month. Patients with COPD are highly susceptible from respiratory infections. So, when the COVID pandemic took us by storm, people suffering from COPD were said to be more at risk. Considering this, there is never a better time to focus on our lung health. People tend to ignore their lungs or give less importance compared to other health aspects. COPD is a long-term condition where the airways of the lungs get narrowed and the air is trapped in the lungs causing difficulty in breathing out. It is mainly characterized by constant and progressive breathlessness, cough, sputum production, and wheezing.

Latest data from WHO says that COPD is the third leading cause of death worldwide. As per Indus Health Plus genetic data report, 23% males and 25% females have increased risk of COPD.

Cause of COPD

Long-term exposure to irritants that damage the lungs and airways can cause COPD. Irritants can be secondhand smoke, air pollution, and chemical fumes or dust from the environment, workplace, or industries. The main cause of COPD is smoking. The rising incidence of COPD is because of poor air quality in metro cities.

Symptoms at various stages

The symptoms of COPD in early stages can be mistaken with cold or flu which includes:

- Occasional breathlessness, especially after a workout or physical activity
- Mild but persistent cough

In the later stage of COPD, one might start avoiding stairs and physical activities. It worsens with time and becomes hard to ignore with experiences that might include:

- Breathlessness even after a short duration of physical activity or taking stairs
- Wheezing
- Chest congestion
- Chronic cough, dry or with mucus
- Frequently getting colds, flu, or other respiratory infections
- Lack of energy
- Fatigue
- Swollen feet, ankles, or legs
- Weight loss

It is likely to get worse if one continues to smoke or is regularly exposed to secondhand smoke.

For COPD, below-mentioned screenings are suggested:

- Pulmonary Function Test: Spirometry is the most common
- Chest X-ray: to check for emphysema and to rule out other lung disorders
- CT- Scan: to check for emphysema and to check if surgery will be helpful for COPD
- Arterial blood gas analysis
- Genetic test for alpha-1-antitrypsin deficiency

To avoid the risk of getting COPD, here are some tips to follow

There are treatments available to help you live better with chronic bronchitis. It can be possible through lifestyle changes, exercise, and medication.

Being Physically Active – Being physically active and working out can help improve breathing, fitness, and quality of life. One should continue involving themselves in the activities that make breathless. Regular activity can help reverse this by improving your muscles.

Breathing Control: There are exercise routines that help you control your breath. Consult a respiratory physiotherapist to find out what works best for you.

A balanced diet and healthy weight: A balanced diet is a must to take as it helps in providing necessary nutrients and maintaining a healthy weight. Consult a dietician or doctor to take advice on what kind of diet you should intake to keep yourself fit if necessary.

Emotional wellbeing: People suffering from severe COPD have been admitted to hospitals and those with low oxygen levels in their body, are at higher risk of getting anxiety and depression. Always consult your doctor and discuss issues like this. Treatments are available and depression can be cured through the right medication and under expert guidance.

Keep your lungs healthy: Prevention is better than cure and keeping lungs healthier is much more efficient than getting it cured once it gets damaged. To keep your lungs healthy, avoid cigarettes, secondhand smoke, air pollution, or industrial exposures, as well as stay physically active.

Regular Screening: In case of having a risk of developing any lung infection, everyone (as per the age bracket they belong to) should go for health checkups and people with risk factors including Genetic Predisposition can't ignore regular checkups at all. Early detection can manage the disease well and can be treated or addressed on time.