Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a term used to describe 2 related lung diseases: chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Chronic bronchitis is inflammation and eventual scarring of the bronchi (airway tubes). Emphysema is enlargement and destruction of the alveoli (air sacs) within the lungs. Many persons with COPD have both of these conditions.

Persons with COPD have difficulty breathing because they develop smaller air passageways and have partially destroyed alveoli. The air passageways also become clogged with mucus, a slimy substance. Smoking cigarettes is the most important risk factor and cause of COPD. About 80% to 90% of COPD cases are caused by smoking, and a smoker is 10 times more likely than a nonsmoker to die of COPD. The November 5, 2003, issue of JAMA includes an article about treatments for COPD.

**SYMPTOMS OF COPD**
- Chronic cough
- Increased sputum (mucus coughed from the airways)
- Shortness of breath
- Limitation of physical activity

**TREATMENTS FOR COPD**
- Stopping smoking—extremely important to prevent worsening of the disease
- Bronchodilators—medications, often taken by an inhaler, that help open air passageways in the lungs
- Corticosteroids—medications taken by inhaler to counteract inflammation in the air passages and lungs
- Oxygen—can help patients with COPD who have a hard time getting enough oxygen; often stored in a portable tank
- Antibiotics—can be helpful for fighting bacterial infections that make symptoms of COPD worse

Sources: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; American Lung Association, American Heart Association

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (301) 592-8573
  [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)
- American Lung Association
  800/LUNG-USA (800/586-4872)
  [www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)

**INFORM YOURSELF**
To find this and other JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on JAMA’s Web site at [www.jama.com](http://www.jama.com). A Patient Page on quitting smoking was published in the July 24/31, 2002, issue; and one on lung disease was published in the April 12, 2000, issue.

Sharon Parmet, MS, Writer
Cassio Lynm, MA, Illustrator
Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

The JAMA Patient Page is a public service of JAMA. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, JAMA suggests that you consult your physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. Any other print or online reproduction is subject to AMA approval. To purchase bulk reprints, call 718/946-7424.