Breathing is such a vital function that your body does it automatically. Your lungs provide an essential step in a system that delivers a continuous supply of life-giving oxygen to your body. Your lungs also help eliminate carbon dioxide (a waste by-product of energy-producing chemical processes) from your body.

An article in the April 12, 2000, issue of JAMA reports on diagnosing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a term used for lung conditions that are characterized by obstruction to the airflow in the respiratory system. If you are experiencing difficulty breathing, you should see your doctor for an evaluation.

**Additional Sources:** National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, American Lung Association, The AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine, The AMA Family Medical Guide

**INFORM YOURSELF:**
To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, check out the AMA’s Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm.