



# COPD



## Bromley

## Well

### HEALTH FACT SHEET

Updated December 2025

## What is COPD?

COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) is a condition where you have long term inflammation in your airways and damage to your air sacs which make it more difficult to breathe.

## What are the symptoms?

- Breathlessness, especially when walking, due to less oxygen reaching the lungs.
- Persistent, chesty cough.
- Wheezing or a tight chest.
- Coughing up a lot of phlegm (regular sputum production).
- Frequent chest infections, especially during the winter.

## What are the causes?

- Smoking is the main cause of COPD as it damages the lining of the airways and lungs.
- Work environments involving exposure to harmful substances such as smoke, fumes, dust and chemicals.
- Air pollution may increase your risk of as it can affect the function of the lungs.
- Genetic disorders, although this is rare.

**References:** NHS Condition: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/asthma/>  
British Lung Foundation  
<https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/conditions/copd-chronic-obstructive-pulmonary-disease>

## SELF CARE TIPS

### STOP SMOKING

This reduces any further damage to the lungs and the airway.

### ATTEND PULMONARY REHABILITATION

This is a specialised programme of exercise and education that provides physical exercise tailored to your needs and ability and also psychological and emotional support.



**To register with Bromley Well:**  
**Freephone 0808 278 7898**  
**Or register online:**  
**[www.bromleywell.org.uk/refer](http://www.bromleywell.org.uk/refer)**

**Contact Lifestyle Support direct**  
**07985 431484 / 07985 444210**  
**or email**  
**[enquiry@bromleywell.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@bromleywell.org.uk)**



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## What about treatment?

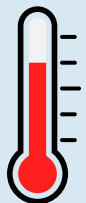
The aim of COPD medication is to slow the progression of the disease, improve your symptoms, and make breathing easier.

- Stopping smoking can massively help with COPD as it reduces the damage to the lungs and airways.
- Inhalers can help with making breathing easier by widening your airways or by reducing inflammation in the airways.
- Medications can expand the airways and reduce inflammation, as well as reduce the thickness of your mucus which makes the mucus easier to clear.
- Pulmonary rehabilitation is an exercise and education programme that is run by healthcare professionals such as physiotherapists, nurse specialists and dieticians. It supports people to become more active and manage their condition.
- Surgery can be considered for some people with severe COPD whose symptoms have not been controlled by medication.

## SELF CARE TIPS

### AVOID TEMPERATURES THAT ARE TOO HOT OR TOO COLD

Extreme temperatures can exacerbate symptoms for those with COPD. Cold temperatures can restrict the airways and trigger coughing. Warm temperatures can feel oppressive but also increase the risk of being dehydrated, which can cause laboured breathing and tire someone with COPD out even more.



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## Some myths

### **Myth 1: COPD only affects smokers**

No, although smoking is the biggest risk factor for COPD, not all people who have COPD have a history of smoking. It is true that COPD is largely caused by different types of air pollution but respiratory infections, asthma, and genetic disorders can also increase your risk.

### **Myth 2: You can't exercise if you have COPD**

Not true, exercise can help improve lung function and general fitness as well as support better mental health. However, it is important that the exercise you do is tailored to someone who has COPD and it is important to build up slowly. An option to get you started is pulmonary rehabilitation.

### **Myth 3: You can stop taking your medication if you feel better**

Incorrect! Medications can take time to build up to a level that relieves symptoms, therefore, stopping prematurely can set you back and even cause worsened symptoms. It is also important to use your medications as a preventative measure for worsening symptoms rather than just when you're having a flare of symptoms. This reduces further damage and inflammation.

## SELF CARE TIPS

### **GET VACCINATED**

Keep up to date with vaccinations like your yearly flu vaccination

### **HAVE REGULAR CHECK-UPS WITH YOUR GP**

To make sure treatment plans are up to date and working for you.



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### FURTHER RESOURCES

#### Asthma + Lung UK

**Helpline 0300 222 5800**

**Email:**

**[helpline@asthmaandlung.org.uk](mailto:helpline@asthmaandlung.org.uk)**

A national charity providing information and advice for the public and for health professionals around asthma and other lung conditions (created in 2020 when Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation combined). They have advice on triggers, inhalers, medication, and how to manage your condition.

#### Bromley Asthma + Lung UK Support Group

**Tel: 0300 303 0253**

Local Support for people living with COPD.

#### Bromley Healthcare Respiratory Team

**Tel: 0300 330 5777**

Community Respiratory Team that help those with chronic respiratory diseases. They assess patients, offer specialist advice and support people in clinics and in the community.

#### NHS Wellbeing Apps

Link to an NHS Wellbeing App, designed to help you manage your lifestyle and help manage your condition.

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