Understanding Your Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

WHAT IS COPD

COPD can be serious. It is a lung disease in which your airways become narrowed. It usually gets worse over time. When you have it, you may not be able to breathe normally. People with COPD sometimes experience flare-ups, or a worsening of symptoms, in the natural course of the disease.

While COPD can't be cured, it can be treated.

COPD stands for
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

Chronic—it’s long term and does not go away
Obstructive—the flow of air from the lungs is partly blocked
Pulmonary—another word for lungs
Disease—impaired lung function

People with COPD can have chronic bronchitis, emphysema, or both.

- **Chronic bronchitis** is a cough with phlegm (mucus) you have most days that doesn’t go away
- **Emphysema** happens when the tiny air sacs in your lungs break down and become bigger and weak. You might feel it’s hard to take a deep breath
WHAT CAUSES COPD

The main cause of COPD is repeated exposure to tobacco smoke. This includes your own or someone else’s.

COPD can also be caused by exposure to pollution and industrial fumes. In a small number of people, COPD is caused by a genetic disorder.

Why should you quit smoking?
Quitting smoking is the best way to slow down the course of COPD. It’s never too late to quit.

Talk with your doctor about ways to quit.
Quitting smoking is tough and can take several tries before you succeed. Your doctor can talk with you about several ways that might help you. And there are things you and your doctor can do to help you breathe better while you are trying to quit.