

Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke



# COPD

## How do your lungs work?

In order to survive your body needs oxygen from the air you breathe. The lungs are designed to absorb oxygen from the air and transfer it into the bloodstream and then to remove waste gases, such as carbon dioxide.

When you breathe air in, through your nose or mouth, it travels down the back of your throat (pharynx), passes through your voice box (larynx), and into your windpipe (trachea). The trachea divides into two passages - the right and left bronchi. One bronchial tube leads to the left lung, the other to the right lung.

The respiratory system has built-in methods to prevent harmful substances from entering your lungs.

## Chest Conditions

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) occurs when the lungs become inflamed, damaged and narrowed and is the name for a group of lung conditions that cause breathing difficulties. It includes:

**Chronic Bronchitis** which is an infection of the main airways of the lungs (bronchi), causing them to become irritated and inflamed. The main symptom is a cough, which may bring up yellow-grey mucus (phlegm). Bronchitis may also cause a sore throat and wheezing.

**Emphysema** is a lung condition that causes shortness of breath due to the air sacs in the lungs (alveoli) being damaged. Over time, the inner walls of the air sacs weaken and rupture, creating larger air spaces instead of many small ones.

## Signs and Symptoms

- A persistent cough
- Wheezing
- Production of mucus
- Shortness of breath
- Chest infections

## What causes COPD?

Smoking



Long-term exposure to harmful fumes or dust



A rare genetic problem such as Alpha1 Antitrypsin deficiency which means the lungs are more vulnerable to damage



## How can I prevent COPD?

You can significantly reduce your chances of developing COPD if you avoid smoking and second-hand smoke. If you already smoke, stopping can help prevent further damage to your lungs before it starts to cause troublesome symptoms.

Check out the following for more information on stop smoking services and support:

- [www.nhs.uk/smokefree](http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree) for a QuitKit
- [www.want2stop.info/stop-smoking-services](http://www.want2stop.info/stop-smoking-services) for local Stop Smoking Services
- Text QUIT to 70004 for SMS support

For general health and wellbeing, follow the lifestyle advice below:

1. Eat a balanced diet



2. Keep physically active



3. Maintain a healthy weight



4. Moderate your alcohol intake



5. Manage your stress levels



6. Get enough sleep



## Further Support

Living with a chest, heart or stroke condition can be challenging, not just for the person affected but for the wider family and carers as well. Our Care Services team at NICHs offers a range of information, support and activities to help people live with their condition. These services are free and can enable people to feel more in control, improve their confidence and know where else to go to for help. For more information, please visit our website [www.nichs.org.uk](http://www.nichs.org.uk)

### Headquarters:

21 Dublin Road  
Belfast BT2 7HB  
T. 028 9032 0184  
E. [mail@nichs.org.uk](mailto:mail@nichs.org.uk)  
[www.nichs.org.uk](http://www.nichs.org.uk)

### Follow us:

- Facebook: [www.facebook.com/NorthernIrelandChestHeartandStroke](https://www.facebook.com/NorthernIrelandChestHeartandStroke)
- Twitter: @nichstweet
- Instagram: @nichstheartandstroke
- LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/company/nichs](https://www.linkedin.com/company/nichs)
- TikTok: @nichstheartandstroke



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™  
We invest in people Silver