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[Sharon E. Straus et al. JAMA. 2000;283\(14\):1853.](#)

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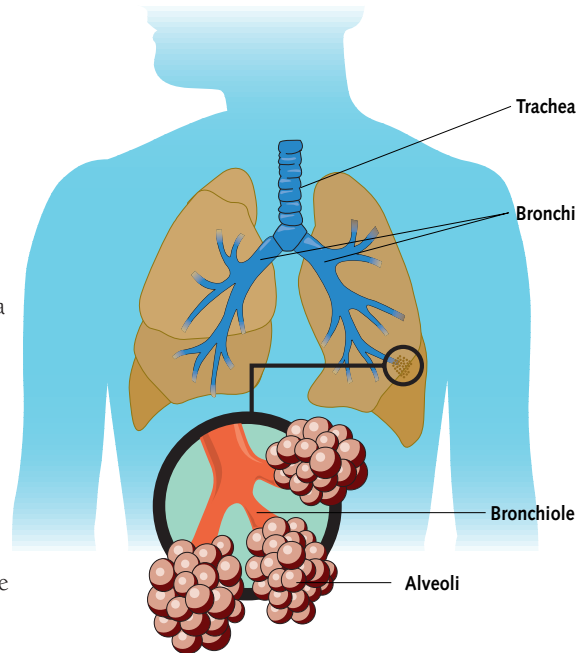
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# Lung Disease

**B**reathing 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.



## CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE:

- **Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)** also known as "chronic obstructive lung disease" — includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema; often both conditions occur together. Smoking is a major cause of COPD.
- **Chronic Bronchitis** — inflammation and scarring of the lining of the **bronchi** (the airways that connect the windpipe to the lungs); symptoms of chronic bronchitis include chronic cough, increased mucus, and shortness of breath
- **Emphysema** — progressive damage to the **alveoli** (air sacs inside the lungs that are key in the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide from the blood to the lungs and vice versa); symptoms of emphysema include cough, shortness of breath, and limited tolerance for exercise

## OTHER LUNG DISEASES:

*Some other common conditions and diseases that affect the lungs:*

- **Asthma** — a chronic disease in which the insides of bronchi and **bronchioles** (the smaller airways that branch off from the bronchi) become inflamed or swollen, narrowing these airways and causing periodic episodes of wheezing and difficulty breathing (asthma attacks).
- **Cystic Fibrosis** — an inherited disease of the body's mucus and sweat producing glands; mucus accumulates in the lungs and causes frequent infections and breathing difficulties, eventually causing permanent damage to the lungs.
- **Lung Cancer** — a condition characterized by uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells; the most common type of lung cancer, bronchogenic carcinoma, is almost always caused by smoking tobacco.
- **Pneumonia** — general term for infection that occurs in the lung, can have a number of causes, including bacteria and viruses.
- **Tuberculosis** — an infection caused by a particular type of bacteria that primarily affects the lungs; the bacteria can damage the lungs by creating an area of inflammation in which tissue is destroyed.

## KEEPING YOUR LUNGS HEALTHY:

- Quit smoking
- Do regular aerobic exercise (such as brisk walking, bicycling, and swimming) in clean, fresh air
- Avoid exposure to secondhand smoke
- Avoid exposure to polluted air
- Wear a high-quality protective mask over your nose and mouth that filters the air when working with toxic substances

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute  
NHLBI Information Center  
P.O. Box 30105  
Bethesda, MD 20824-0105  
301/592-8573 or [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)
- American Lung Association  
800-586-4872  
[www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)

## INFORM YOURSELF:

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

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