



Every Breath You Take

Keeping Your Lungs Healthy

Most of the time, we don't think about our lungs. They are part of the body's respiratory system, the organs and tissues that work together to help us breathe. Their main job? To move fresh air into the body when we inhale air and remove a "waste" gas called carbon dioxide when we exhale.

The lungs mature at around age 25. They are capable of holding four to six liters of air. Think of three large soda bottles. On average, adults take 20,000 to 25,000 breaths a day, children take more like 30,000.

Our lungs have a natural defense system. For example, the small hairs in the nose help stop tiny dust particles from being breathed into the lungs. The bronchial tubes deep in our lungs have small hairs called cilia that move like waves to send mucus out of the lungs and into the throat where it can be coughed up.

Tips for Lung Health

Around age 35, our lung function begins to very s-l-o-w-l-y decline. There are steps to take that can keep the lungs humming along in the best possible shape, even though our lung capacity gradually reduces as we get older.

The first step is, yes, you guessed it: don't smoke! Cigarette smoke narrows the airways, making it harder to move clean air in and waste air out. Smoking damages the airways and lung tissue; it is the

leading cause of lung cancer (95% of lung cancers are caused by smoking). [It's never too late to benefit from quitting!](#) The [American Lung Association](#), your provider and KnovaSolutions can help if you are ready to quit.

Avoiding inside and outside air pollution go a long way towards keeping the lungs healthy. Breathing second-hand smoke and harsh cleaning chemicals in your home or office can make you sick. Ask any smokers (who you can't convince to quit) to smoke outdoors. Keep your home and work space as clean as you can; mold, dust and pet dander can irritate the lungs. Consider using vinegar water or other mild cleaning products. Open windows when using products that have fumes. Avoid air fresheners and candles that contain chemicals like formaldehyde or benzene. Essential oils used with a diffuser is a safer way to freshen the air. When outdoor air quality is bad, stay indoors as much as possible. If you think something in the air at home or work is making you sick, start a list of what makes your symptoms worse. You may be able to avoid or reduce your exposure to what causes sneezing or coughing.

It's about this time of year that respiratory problems tend to increase. Cold and flu season is associated with stuffy noses and chest coughs. To avoid getting sick, wash your hands often with soap and water, or use hand-sanitizers when you can't

Managing Asthma

Asthma can make breathing difficult, the airways narrow and swell, and extra mucus is made. Asthma, a common lung condition, can't be cured but the symptoms can be controlled by making an asthma action plan with your provider.

It's important to understand the triggers that cause or worsen symptoms; they can range from pollen and cold air to exercise and the common cold.

Taking medication as prescribed, even when symptoms are improving, is important. Notice when the need for your rescue inhaler increases or other signs of an asthma episode. Treating attacks early, reduces the likelihood of having a severe attack and needing more medication.

Treating COPD

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a common lung disease that causes increasing breathlessness. COPD includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis. COPD damages the airways and makes breathing very difficult. It is caused by long-term exposure to harmful gases, primarily cigarette smoking. While there isn't yet a cure, there are many things that can be done to manage COPD.

If you have increasing shortness of breath or breathlessness, frequent coughing, wheezing or tightness in the chest, be sure to see your provider. Depending upon the type of COPD, different treatments will be recommended. Other conditions like heartburn, high blood pressure, depression or diabetes can affect how COPD is managed.

The [COPD Foundation](#) is a good source of information. KnovaSolutions can also help. We can provide information about the condition, treatment options and support you as you learn to manage it.

The information contained in this newsletter is for general, educational purposes. It should not be considered a replacement for consultation with your healthcare provider. If you have concerns about your health, please contact your healthcare provider.

wash. Get the flu shot. It may not be perfect, but it can significantly reduce your chances of getting the flu, which can last two to four weeks. Ask your provider if you should have the pneumonia vaccine. Avoid being in close quarters with crowds since germs are spread by breathing, touching and coughing. If your work mates or family members are sick, be careful to keep your distance and wash shared surfaces. Brushing your teeth at least twice a day can remove germs from your mouth before they have a chance to take hold.

Having regular check-ups with your provider can help prevent all kinds of health conditions, including breathing problems. Generally healthy people may not need to see a provider more than every two years, but if you notice anything out of the ordinary, it may be worth a visit. Providers do routine tests like taking blood pressure and listening to your heart and lungs. These preventive steps can help stop health problems from starting in the first place or from worsening into more serious conditions.

Exercise gives your lungs a workout. Regular aerobic exercise (activities that make your heart beat fast and cause you to breathe rapidly) strengthens your lungs so they can do their job more efficiently. This can slow down the aging process and reduce the chances of developing lung conditions. Of course, exercise has many more benefits too, like improving mood, reducing blood pressure and managing weight.

Recognizing Signs of Disease

Since breathing is something we often take for granted, it's good to know the symptoms of lung disease. Here are some warning signs:

- A chronic cough, one that has been hanging on for a month or longer. Ask your provider if any of your medications could be causing the cough.

- Shortness of breath when you've been at rest/doing little or that doesn't go away after exercising.
- Difficulty breathing in and out.
- Chronic mucus production. Producing mucus, or phlegm, is the way your airways defend against infection or irritants.
- Wheezing. A whistle or other noisy breathing may mean the airways have narrowed or that something is blocking them.
- Coughing up blood signals that something is bleeding internally.
- Chest pain. May be a sign of a heart condition but if it gets worse when breathing or coughing, it may be a lung condition.

Common Lung Conditions

The flu (influenza) is an infection caused by a virus that affects your nose, throat and lungs. For most people, the flu clears up on its own but for those at higher risk or who develop complications, it can be very serious, even fatal. Pneumonia can be a complication of the flu, though there are many other causes. It is a lung infection caused by bacteria, a virus or a fungus. Depending upon the type of infection, antibiotics or other medications may be prescribed. Higher risk people include young children, the elderly, those with weakened immune systems and those with chronic illnesses like asthma and heart disease. Another common lung condition is bronchitis, a swelling of the bronchial tubes that carry air to and from the lungs. It's like a chest cold that includes coughing up thick mucus. Read about two other common lung conditions in the boxes.

Taking care of your lungs is as important as taking care of the rest of your body. If you have questions or concerns about your health, call KnovaSolutions. We are ready to help! Call us at **800/355-0885**.