

# SENIORS AND COPD

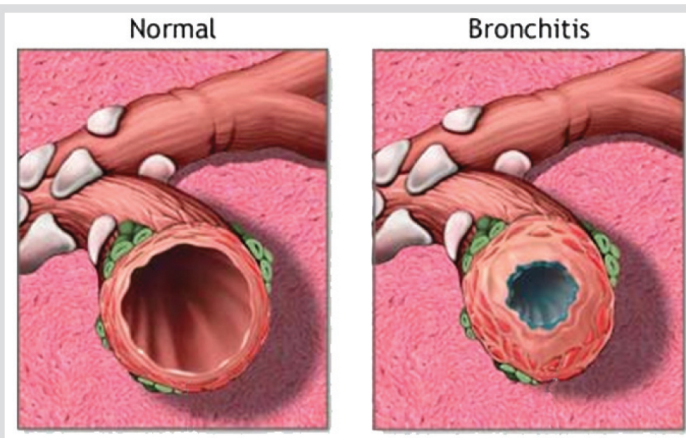
Although COPD is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States, many seniors are not familiar with this acronym. Standing for “Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease,” COPD is characterized by chronic airflow limitation in the lungs. Most often a combination of two diseases—chronic bronchitis and emphysema—this umbrella term also includes diseases such as chronic asthma and severe bronchiectasis.

While more than 12 million Americans have COPD, another 12 million likely have the disease and aren’t aware of it, according to the Centers for Disease Control. “This is a disease that comes on slowly. A person is often short of breath and thinks, ‘I’m out of shape,’” says Richard Batiste, Manager of Respiratory Care Services at Centinela Hospital. “People think shortness of breath is normal as you get older, but it’s not. Most often, people are not diagnosed with COPD until they have lost 50 percent of their lung function.”

Although there is no cure for seniors with COPD, treatment and management of the disease can have numerous positive effects:

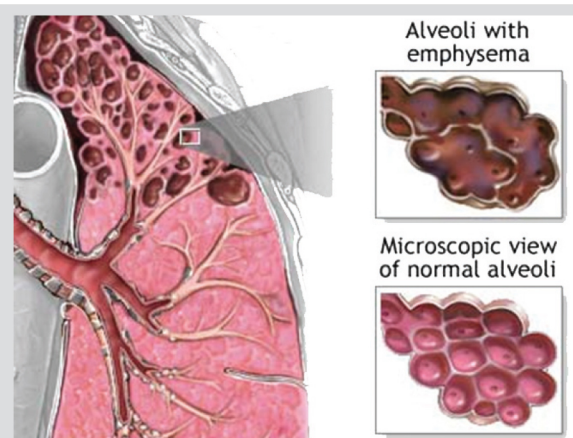
- Relieve symptoms
- Prevent disease progression
- Improve exercise tolerance
- Improve health status
- Prevent and treat complications
- Prevent lung infections and airway irritations
- Reduce mortality

For seniors with COPD, self-care is important. Preventive habits include: good hygiene such as frequent hand washing, getting scheduled flu and pneumococcal vaccines, staying out of crowds during winter, good nutrition, and regular exercise. Support groups such as the American Lung Association’s Better Breathers Clubs are also helpful. It’s vital that patients still lead an active social life. “It’s very important psychologically not to take the diagnosis and say I have to stay home in my easy chair and not do anything anymore,” says Batiste. “Patients need to get involved and maintain a healthy and normal lifestyle, doing the things that are important to them.”



## What is Chronic Bronchitis?

Chronic Bronchitis is a condition of increased swelling and mucus production in the breathing tubes. Airway obstruction occurs in chronic bronchitis because the swelling and extra mucus causes the inside of the breathing tubes to become smaller than normal.



## What is Emphysema?

Emphysema damages the walls of the air sacs (alveoli) of the lung. In emphysema, the walls of the alveoli lose their stretchiness and trap air. This combination of constantly having extra air in the lungs and the extra effort needed to breathe results in a person feeling short of breath.