

10 Terms You Need To Know

Everyone with COPD needs to know these 10 terms. They should become a part of your regular conversations about your health.

by Dr. Robert A. Sandhaus

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Alpha-1 — A genetic condition that can cause COPD in adults. Requires treatment different from that used for other types of COPD. COPD patients can have Alpha-1 without knowing it.

Exacerbations — Flare-ups or episodes of worsened shortness of breath, often accompanied by increased sputum volume and change in sputum color. Frequently caused by infections in the airways or lungs.

Family — Your loved ones, including your kids. Talk to them about your lung condition, help them to understand it and avoid risks.

Fault — Blame. It's not your fault that you have COPD. In addition to cigarette smoking, risk factors include genetic susceptibilities that scientists are now just beginning to understand.

Meds — Medications or drugs prescribed by your doctor, including inhalers. Take them only as directed.

Oxygen Level — The amount of oxygen absorbed in the blood. It should be checked, especially under exertion. Use supplemental oxygen as instructed to boost your oxygen level.

Pulmonary Rehab— Short for “pulmonary rehabilitation,” a program of exercise, education, and testing prescribed by your doctor. It can improve your health.

Risk Factors— Smoking, secondhand smoke, genetics, environmental contaminants, and occupational hazards that affect the likelihood of a person developing COPD and make the condition worse. Reduce them: stop smoking, avoid environmental contaminants, check exposures associated with your job, prevent lung infections, and get annual flu shots and other immunizations.

Sleep Problems— Low oxygen levels or breathing problems, including snoring or stopping breathing, while sleeping.

Treatable— Capable of being cared for medically. COPD is treatable but, at present, not curable.

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