

Recent advances in medical treatment for COPD now allow patients with even the most advanced forms of the disease to breath more easily.

# COPD: Improving Symptoms & Quality of Life

*Written by Board Certified Pulmonology/Critical Care*

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Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a common condition that causes loss of lung function and results in cough, shortness-of-breath and sometimes the need for oxygen. Most of us know someone with a form of this disease. The diagnosis of COPD includes patients with chronic bronchitis, emphysema or a combination of each of these. Smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke are the most common causes of COPD but patients with asthma, chronic sinus disease and recurrent respiratory infections can also develop the condition. Recent advances in medical treatment for COPD make it very

important that patients at risk for COPD have an appropriate medical evaluation.

The number of people in the United States with COPD is increasing each year and it is now the 4th leading killer of Americans. Well over 12 million people have COPD and it will lead to the death of hundreds of thousands of Americans this year and result in significant injury, missed work and disability for millions more. Many patients are not aware that they have COPD because symptoms may not appear until the disease is advanced. This fact along with the increasing incidence of the disease make it imperative that early detection be offered to all at risk.

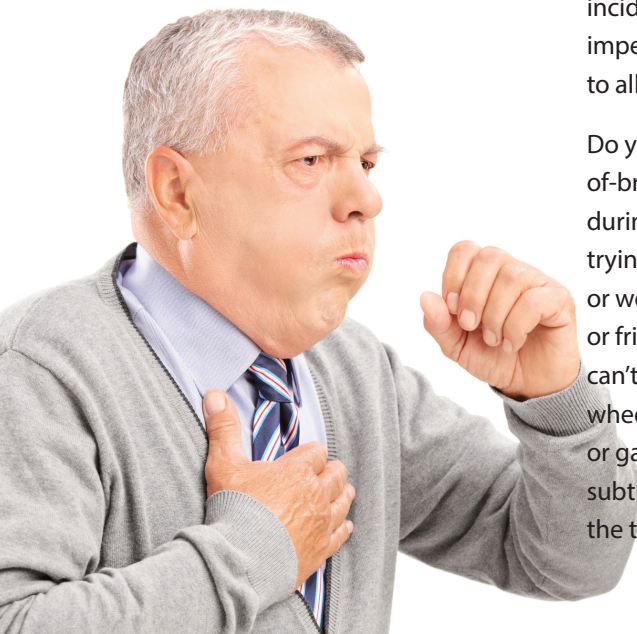
Do you or someone you know get short-of-breath when walking a flight of stairs, during hot or humid weather or when trying to complete household chores or work tasks? Do they ask their spouse or friends to slow down because they can't keep up? What about symptoms of wheezing, "rattling" sounds in the chest, or gasping for air? Symptoms may be as subtle as being tired or having a cold all the time. These are all typical complaints

for a patient with COPD and patients with these symptoms should be evaluated.

The importance of early detection can't be emphasized enough. In the Pulmonary Division at Yankton Medical Clinic, we provide an easy and painless exam called pulmonary (lung) function testing (PFT). This test measures a patient's ability to blow air out forcefully, as well as the volume of the lungs and chest cavity. The test allows your doctor to determine the degree of lung function or capacity and measure blood oxygen levels without a needle stick. All patients at risk for or suspected of having COPD should be referred for pulmonary function testing.

If your doctor determines that you have COPD, he or she should refer you to a Pulmonologist (lung specialist) for treatment. The most important first treatment is making an attempt to avoid all cigarette smoke. Stopping smoking will result in an immediate improvement in breathing and in lung function.

Recent advances in medical treatment for COPD now allow patients with even the most advanced forms of the disease to breath more easily. These medications improve quality of life as well as increase survival and life expectancy. They help



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to prevent exacerbations that result in bronchitis, pneumonia, missed work, and hospital admissions. Almost all of these medications are covered by Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance. They are inhaled or administered by a nebulizer machine in the convenience of the patient's home. Your doctor will help you determine what treatment is best for you. The medications are expected to result in almost an immediate improvement in symptoms of cough and shortness-of-breath. Almost all of them are taken twice a day or less. They are easy to use and effective treatments for a serious disease.

So, if you or someone you know suffers from symptoms of cough, shortness-

of-breath, wheezing or fatigue I advise that you consider a simple and easy evaluation for COPD. If you are diagnosed with the condition, there are multiple treatment options that can improve your symptoms, your quality of life and help to reduce the chance that you will develop bronchitis, pneumonia or end up admitted to the hospital. Although COPD is a chronic disease that is not curable, it can be managed and patients can lead nearly normal, symptom-free lives with proper treatment.

There are many people with COPD that don't even know they have it. There are some that fear they may have the disease but hesitate to be evaluated because they

think there are no treatments, but that is simply not the case. COPD is a major contributor to illness, injury, missed work and reduced quality of life as well as a killer of many Americans. The earlier the disease is detected, the sooner treatment can be offered and symptoms relieved. I encourage our readers and all individuals with symptoms of COPD or risk factors for COPD to contact the Pulmonary Division at the Yankton Medical Clinic or ask your family doctor about a proper evaluation. Special testing can be performed and we can establish a treatment regiment tailored to each and every patient. The ultimate goal at YMC is to do the right thing for every patient every time.

***For more information or to schedule an appointment please call 605-665-1152.***