Live Well, Work Well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by The Reschini Group

COPD: CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE

Currently the fourth-leading cause of death worldwide, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) has no cure and the damage it causes is irreversible. Fortunately, a majority of COPD cases can be avoided through simple lifestyle changes.

The Basics

COPD is a lung disease in which the airways are partially obstructed, making it difficult to get air in and out. Over time it will make breathing increasingly difficult. COPD develops slowly, and it may take many years before symptoms are noticed. It is usually diagnosed in those middle-aged or older. COPD is not contagious; however, there are several risk factors that greatly increase your chance of developing it.

Risk Factors

- Smoking—Former or current smokers are at the greatest risk and account for 90 percent of those suffering from COPD.
- Pollution—Intense or prolonged exposure to air pollution can cause irreversible lung damage.
- Genetics—Studies have shown that some people may have a genetic predisposition to the development of respiratory conditions, including COPD.
- History—People who have a history of frequent or severe lung infections, especially during childhood, may be at an increased risk.

Symptoms

Common symptoms associated with COPD include a phlegm-producing cough that won't go away, shortness of breath, wheezing, chest tightness, and frequent throat clearing.

Prevention

Not smoking is the most effective way to prevent the development of COPD, and the best way to slow or stop its progression. It is also important to stay away from secondhand smoke. Reduce your exposures to other lung irritants such as pollution, dust, and certain cooking or heating fumes. Try to stay inside when the outside air quality is poor.

Treatment

COPD's effect on your lungs cannot be reversed, but there are things you can do to feel better and slow future damage. Medicine and pulmonary rehabilitation are often used to help relieve symptoms, allowing patients to breathe easier and stay active.

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