



Stop COPD before it starts

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, which includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema, is a chronic lung disease that causes obstructed airflow from the lungs, making it hard to breathe. The disease affects more than 11 million Americans and is the third leading cause of death in the U.S. There is no cure for COPD, but it can be prevented and treated. Early detection is imperative to successful treatment so you should talk with your doctor if you have any of these symptoms:

- Chronic cough.
- Shortness of breath, especially during everyday activities.
- Frequent respiratory infections.
- Mucus production.
- Wheezing.
- Blueness in lips or fingernails.
- Fatigue.
- Swelling in feet, ankles or leg.

What's happening to your lungs when you have any of the symptoms?

The air sacs (alveoli) in your lungs have become inflamed, enlarged and blocked. When the air spaces in the depths of the lungs have become enlarged, that can lead to irreversible damage. Continued smoking will guarantee these delicate sacs will eventually be destroyed.

What are the risk factors for COPD?

You should also consider talking with your doctor if you have any of the risk factors for COPD. The No. 1 risk factor is smoking, followed by exposure to secondhand smoke. If you have asthma and smoke, you are at significant risk as well. Exposure to dust and chemical fumes, and genetics are also some contributing factors.

The trucking industry is known to have a large population of smokers.

According to NIOSH, 51 percent of truck drivers smoke. The St. Christopher Truckers Relief Fund shows that COPD is in their top 10 diagnoses. So, if you want to curb the effects of COPD or stop them before they start, the best way is to quit smoking. It's been shown that it's harder to quit smoking than it is to stop heroin, but we are here to help.

And as Theodore Roosevelt said, "Believe you can and you're halfway there."

So, what are the next steps?

- Verify that you do not have another underlying disease that may mimic COPD.
- If it's determined you have COPD and the cause is smoking, make a plan to stop.

The St. Christopher Truckers Fund has a smoking cessation program designed for truck drivers called Rigs Without Cigs. You can register to get motivation, fellow truck driver support and free tools to help you quit. They have already helped more than 50 drivers quit smoking completely.

Call and get help. Call your personal physician. If you don't have one, call me if you need advice on how to stop smoking and a COPD treatment program. COPD treatment and smoking cessation are tough, up-hill battles. Don't give up, your life depends on it.

Remember we need you Kings of the Interstates and Queens of the Highways to keep the rest of us alive. **LL**



Steps to handle the first day of not smoking

■ Make a quit plan.

A quit plan helps you stay focused and motivated to quit. Visit SmokeFree.gov to learn ways to build a plan.

smokefree.gov

■ Stay busy.

Being busy will help keep your mind off smoking and distract you from cravings. Exercise, chewing gum, and going to a movie are some of the suggestions for helping you keep your mind off needing a cigarette.

■ Avoid smoking triggers.

Triggers are people, places, things and situations that set off your urge to smoke.

■ Stay positive.

Try not to think of quitting as forever. Pay attention to today and build off of that.

■ Ask for help.

Tell your family and friends when your quit day is and ask for their support.

Information: SmokeFree.gov