

Being involved in your own treatment and staying as healthy as possible is essential to living with lung disease.

Lung Disease

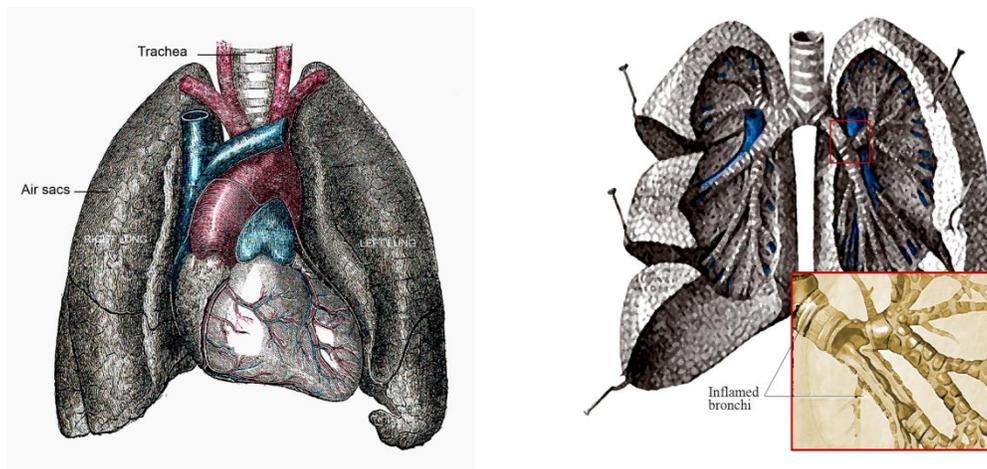
What Is Lung Disease?

Lung disease is any disease or disorder that reduces the function of your lungs. The main function of your lungs is respiration. The air that you breathe contains several gases, including oxygen, which your body needs to function. With each breath, your lungs add fresh oxygen to your blood, which then carries it to the rest of the body.

Diseases that affect the lungs include asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), infections like influenza, pneumonia and tuberculosis, lung cancer, and other breathing problems. Many of these conditions are progressive, which means that they will gradually get worse unless they are treated.

The main types of lung disease are:

- ❖ Obstructive lung disease, where the amount of air that can be exhaled is limited by a narrowing or blockage of the airways. Asthma, COPD, and chronic bronchitis are examples of obstructive lung disease.
- ❖ Restrictive lung disease, where the total volume of air the lungs are able to hold has decreased, often due to a decrease in the elasticity of the lungs
- ❖ A defect in the ability of the lung tissue to move oxygen into the blood
- ❖ A combination of these categories, like emphysema, which involves both airflow obstruction and oxygenation problems.



What Causes Lung Disease?

There are many known causes of lung disease, including:

- ❖ Smoking, including secondhand smoke, is the number one cause of lung disease
- ❖ Radon gas, a naturally occurring radioactive gas that is present in soil and rocks and that can collect in buildings
- ❖ Asbestos, a natural mineral fiber that can harm the lungs when inhaled
- ❖ Air pollutants such as car exhaust may contribute to asthma, COPD, and other lung diseases

Who Is at Risk of Lung Disease?

Your risk of lung disease increases if you:

- ❖ Have a history of smoking or long exposure to secondhand smoking
- ❖ Are an adult (although infants and children sometimes develop asthma or have other lung conditions)
- ❖ Have been exposed to occupational and environmental toxins (air pollution, dust and smoke)
- ❖ Have had radiation treatments to your chest or certain chemotherapy drugs to fight cancer
- ❖ Have a family history of lung disease

What Are the Signs and Symptoms?

Some common signs of lung disease include the following:

- ❖ Difficulty breathing
- ❖ Shortness of breath (breathlessness), even with mild exercise
- ❖ A cough that will not go away or that keeps coming back
- ❖ Coughing up blood
- ❖ Pain or discomfort when breathing in or out



How Is Lung Disease Diagnosed?

Your doctor will diagnose lung disease by performing one or more of the following tests:

- ❖ Pulmonary Function Test (PFT): measures how well you breathe and how much air you can hold in your lungs.
- ❖ Spirometry (one type of PFT): measures the amount of air you can breathe in and out
- ❖ Imaging tests: including a chest x-ray, CT scan, or an MRI
- ❖ Bronchoscopy: a small tube called a bronchoscope is inserted through the nose or mouth and down the windpipe to look at the airways and lungs
- ❖ Biopsy, in which a small sample of lung tissue is removed (often during the bronchoscopy) and examined
- ❖ Sputum cytology, in which a sample of sputum or mucus coughed up from the lungs is examined
- ❖ Ventilation - perfusion scan, which is a test for abnormal blood flow in the lungs.

What Are Common Treatments?

Treatment for lung disease depends greatly on your diagnosis and overall state of health.

The following medications, which are used to treat lung disease, often are given in an inhaled form:

- ❖ Corticosteroids
- ❖ Bronchodilators
- ❖ Antibiotics
- ❖ Anticoagulants

Other treatments include physical therapy and using an oxygen tank.

Being engaged in your own treatment and staying as healthy as possible is essential to living with lung disease. You can do this by:

- ❖ Enrolling in a pulmonary rehabilitation program, which can improve your ability to exercise and carry out normal activities, manage shortness of breath with breathing techniques, and improve your overall quality of life
- ❖ Quitting smoking
- ❖ Exercising regularly, which can help maintain lung function, reduce stress and depression, and increase overall health and well-being.
- ❖ Following a healthy diet
- ❖ Maintaining a healthy body mass index (BMI), which can improve your ability to breathe and to exercise

Can Lung Disease Be Prevented?

The single best way to prevent lung disease is to stop smoking or never start. Avoid exposure to substances known to cause lung disease, including secondhand smoke. Regular exercise and healthy nutrition are also important in preventing and treating respiratory disease.

Should I Call My Doctor?

If any of the following symptoms mentioned gets worse, call your doctor immediately:

- ❖ Trouble breathing
- ❖ Shortness of breath
- ❖ Coughing up blood or mucus
- ❖ Pain or discomfort when breathing in or out\

For More Information

For more information, refer to the following medical resources:

<http://www.lungusa.org/lung-disease/>

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000066.htm>

The content in this document is neither intended nor recommended as a substitute for seeking professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. It is recommended that you seek the advice of your physician or other qualified healthcare professional regarding any medical questions related to the topics contained within this document, your health or conditions.