



CAUSES

The most common cause of COPD is **long-term cigarette smoking**. In fact, most cases of COPD are caused by smoking.

Not everyone who smokes develops COPD, though, and not everyone with COPD has a history of smoking. Nonsmokers can get COPD too.

Additional causes of COPD include:

- **Exposure to work-related dusts and chemicals.** Certain vapors, fumes, and dusts (such as coal dust and silica) can contribute to the development of COPD.
- **Indoor air pollution.** According to the World Health Organization, nearly 3 billion people around the world cook their food and heat their homes with open fires or leaky stoves. These fires and stoves produce small soot particles that contribute to indoor air pollution and the development of COPD. Poorly ventilated homes increase the risk of serious indoor air pollution and COPD.
- **Secondhand smoke.** Some nonsmokers who develop cigarette-related COPD have been exposed to secondhand smoke. Many live with smokers or spent years working in smoke-filled environments, such as bars or restaurants.
- **Alpha1-antitrypsin deficiency (also called Alpha-1).** This uncommon, inherited disorder increases the risk of lung and liver disease. Current guidelines recommend testing once for alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency in adults with symptomatic COPD regardless of smoking history. Alpha-1 can only be diagnosed with a blood test.
- **Childhood respiratory infection.** Evidence suggests that colds and respiratory viruses in childhood, especially before age 2, may decrease lung function and increase the risk of developing breathing problems and COPD in adulthood.