
Treating Breathing Issues:

Have you been told that you have COPD or prescribed an inhaler (puffer) for COPD, but never been tested?

Choosing
Wisely
Canada

THE COLLEGE OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS
OF CANADA



LE COLLÈGE DES
MÉDECINS DE FAMILLE
DU CANADA

SOCIÉTÉ
CANADIENNE DE
THORACOLOGIE



CANADIAN
THORACIC
SOCIETY

What is COPD?

COPD stands for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

It is also called emphysema or chronic bronchitis. It is a type of damage to the lungs caused mostly by smoking cigarettes.

COPD and other conditions can have the same symptoms.

COPD usually starts after age 40 and can make you feel short of breath. Sometimes even with simple chores, you may wheeze when you exert yourself.

You may also have a chronic cough, often with phlegm. When you get a cold, you may notice that it lasts longer than other people's colds.

COPD is a chronic disease which slowly gets worse (progresses) over time. Quitting smoking slows down its progression.

COPD inhalers help you to:

- Breathe better
- Be more active
- Stay out of hospital

It is important to know if the symptoms you are having are caused by COPD, so that you get the right treatment.

COPD symptoms can feel the same as symptoms of other health conditions, such as asthma, heart disease, or less common lung conditions such as lung “fibrosis” (scarring).



Some people on COPD inhalers may not actually have COPD.

Studies show that some people who use COPD inhalers do not actually have COPD. This means:

- They are taking inhalers that they don't actually need
- Are at risk of having side effects from those medications
- Are spending money on a potentially unnecessary treatment

All the while, the true reason for their symptoms is not being treated.

About Choosing Wisely Canada

Choosing Wisely Canada is the national voice for reducing unnecessary tests and treatments in health care. One of its important functions is to help clinicians and patients engage in conversations that lead to smart and effective care choices.

How this pamphlet was created:

This brochure was created through a partnership between Choosing Wisely Canada, the College of Family Physician of Canada, and the Canadian Thoracic Society and supported by the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, the Family Physicians Airway Group of Canada the Canadian Society of Internal Medicine, the Canadian Lung Association, the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists, Asthma Canada, COPD Canada, the Lung Health Foundation, the Alberta Health Services/Alberta Medical Association, and Respiratory Health Strategic Clinical Network (RHSCN).

This pamphlet is for you to use when talking with your health care provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this pamphlet is at your own risk.

Talk with your health care provider.

The best way to know for sure if you have COPD is with a simple breathing test called spirometry.

When your health care provider sends you for a spirometry test, they have a better idea of how serious your condition is and will be better able to give you the right treatment. As a result, if you have COPD, you may have less complications and a lower risk of dying from COPD.

If you have been told that you have COPD and have been prescribed a COPD inhaler, but have never had a spirometry test, ask your health care provider about this test.

Always speak with your health care provider before making any changes to your medications.