Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

COPD is an obstruction/limitation of the airflow from and to the lungs. It also includes disease such as; chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

Symptoms:
- Chronic or progressive shortness of breath
- Chronic cough
- Sputum production

Less common symptoms:
- Wheezing/chest tightness
- In severe COPD, weight loss, loss of appetite and tiredness are common

COPD patients are also likely to experience episodes called acute exacerbations, during which their symptoms become worse and persist for days or longer.

COPD is largely caused by cigarette smoking and other noxious particles.

The disease is commonly confused with asthma because of certain symptom overlap, however; asthma is not included in COPD, but people with asthma are at risk of developing COPD over time.

Chronic bronchitis:
Is the swelling of the lining of the 2 bronchi (brown-k –i) through which air passes into the lungs.

**Chronic Bronchitis**

Normal bronchial tube

Inflamed bronchial tube

Thick, sticky mucous blocks up the airways

Emphysema:
Air sacs called alveoli (al-v-o-lie) are located in clusters at the end of the bronchi in the lungs. In emphysema the alveoli get damaged losing their elasticity and cannot stretch as a result the air is trapped within the air sacs and affects airflow.

**Emphysema**

Normal alveoli

Alveoli with emphysema

Air exchange occurs in alveoli

Air becomes trapped

CO₂ = carbon dioxide

O₂ = oxygen

Treatment: Smoking cessation along with the use of effective inhaler medications (puffers) may improve symptoms of COPD.

Outcome: COPD is a preventable and treatable disease, but with no permanent cure. Smoking cessation and compliance with prescribed medications would help to improve symptoms of COPD and reduce exacerbations. Home oxygen may be required in advanced cases.

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