



## Emphysema Awareness Month is observed in the month of November.

Normal lung tissue looks like a new sponge. Emphysematous lung looks like an old used sponge, with large holes and a dramatic loss of “springy-ness” or elasticity. Emphysema gradually damages the air sacs (alveoli) in your lungs, making you progressively more short of breath. When the lung tissue is damaged, these airways collapse, making it difficult for the lungs to empty and the air (gases) becomes trapped in the alveoli. Emphysema is one of several diseases known collectively as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Slow deterioration is the rule, and it may go unnoticed.

Smoking is the leading cause of emphysema.

### Causes:

The main cause of emphysema is long-term exposure to airborne irritants, including:

-  Tobacco smoke.
-  Marijuana smoke.
-  Air pollution.
-  Manufacturing fumes.

### When to see a doctor?

Seek immediate medical attention if:

-  You're so short of breath, you can't climb stairs.
-  Your lips or fingernails turn blue or gray with exertion.
-  You're not mentally alert.
-  If you have new or worsening shortness of breath.
-  Gradual decrease in the ability to exercise or perform daily activities, a persistent cough, and wheezing .
-  Worsening shortness of breath in spite of home medications.
-  Inability to speak in full sentences may be a sign of shortness of breath.

### Symptoms:

The symptoms of emphysema include:

-  Breathlessness with exertion, and eventually breathlessness all the time.
-  Susceptibility to chest infections.
-  Sputum produced with chronic bronchitis.
-  Coughing.
-  Fatigue.
-  Expansion of the ribcage, due to over-expansion of the lungs.
-  Cyanosis (a blue tinge to the skin) due to lack of oxygen.
-  One of the hallmark signs of emphysema is "pursed-lip breathing."

**Diagnosis:**

- ✚ Chest x-ray.
- ✚ Lung function tests.
- ✚ White blood cell count.
- ✚ Arterial blood gas.

**Coping and support:**

The shortness of breath associated with emphysema can severely limit your ability to participate in daily activities. Many people become withdrawn and depressed. To help you cope with the changes emphysema has made in your life, you might want to:

- ✚ Express your feelings. Your emphysema may limit some of your activities and affect your family's plans and routines in ways you can't always anticipate.
- ✚ Consider a support group.

**Prevention:**

- ✚ Don't smoke and avoid breathing secondhand smoke.
- ✚ Wear a mask to protect your lungs if you work with chemical fumes or dust.
- ✚ Obtain the pneumococcal vaccine every 5 years and the influenza virus vaccine every year, before flu season.

**Prognosis:**

The diagnosis of emphysema is not a death sentence.

- ✚ There is no cure, but there are effective methods of treatment, which can slow the progression of the disease.
- ✚ It is a chronic, progressive disease that affects the quality of life at least as much as the length of life.
- ✚ The prognosis decreases if the individual decides to continue to smoke.
- ✚ Regular visits to your doctor and taking medications as prescribed.

**Things to remember:**

- ✚ Emphysema is a type of lung disease that is characterized by shortness of breath.
- ✚ Emphysema is usually caused by cigarette smoking.
- ✚ There is no cure, but the condition can be managed using medications and adjustments to lifestyle.
- ✚ If you or someone near to you has shortness of breath or a long-term productive cough, see your doctor for a lung function test.

**Reference Links:**

- ✚ <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/emphysema/basics/prevention/con-20014218>
- ✚ <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Emphysema>
- ✚ [www.emedicinehealth.com](http://www.emedicinehealth.com) > ... > lung disease & respiratory health

**For any enquiry or assistance please contact:** [wellness@medicaretpa.co.in](mailto:wellness@medicaretpa.co.in)

**Disclaimer:** No information contained here should be relied on in making health decisions. Always check with your doctor or other health care provider.