

## CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD) AND ASTHMA

Both diseases are chronic respiratory diseases and are increasingly common conditions. There are similarities in symptoms and treatment but it is important to know the difference between the two.

### What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic disease that affects your airways. Your airways are tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs. If you have asthma, the inside walls of your airways become sore and swollen. That makes them very sensitive, and they may react strongly to things that you are **allergic** to or find irritating. When your airways react, they get narrower and your lungs get less air. This can cause **wheezing, coughing, chest tightness, and trouble breathing**. When your asthma symptoms become worse than usual, it's called an **asthma attack**. In a severe asthma attack, the airways can close so much that your vital organs do not get enough oxygen. People can die from severe asthma attacks.

### What is COPD?

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) makes it hard for you to breathe. **Coughing up mucus** and **shortness of breath** are often the first signs of COPD. In COPD, your airways and air sacs lose their shape and become “floppy”.

**Cigarette smoking** is the most common cause of COPD. Breathing in other kinds of irritants, like pollution, dust, or chemicals, may also cause or contribute to COPD. **Quitting smoking is the best way to avoid developing COPD.**

Treatment can make you more comfortable, but there is no cure.

### How much will symptoms improve?

When asthma treatment is taken consistently, most people can have good symptom control and carry on doing what they like including physical activities, having fun, learning, sleeping, playing sports, or other everyday activities. There are many athletes, such as hockey players (e.g. Gary Roberts) and other Olympic medal winners, who have well-controlled asthma, enabling them to take part in sports. The key is to manage asthma **by avoiding your triggers** and **effective medication**.

Asthma can be treated and managed.

Once you have COPD, it's hard to reverse the changes. Patients can improve their symptom control and reduce how often they have a flare-up, but they will still have airflow obstruction.

### The Importance of Education

Asthma and COPD need regular medication to maintain day-to-day control. The patients will benefit from a structured education program from a trained educator.

Asthma information online

[www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/ican/index.html](http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/ican/index.html)

Watch a video in English on Asthma or on COPD among other topics by visiting [www.calgaryhealthregion.ca](http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca) and clicking on the human atlas icon

Source : Calgary Health Region website and Apple magazine.