



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Breathe Easy

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and Associated Health-Care Resource Uses — North Carolina, 2007 and 2009

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Difficulty taking a breath can be a serious and scary situation. One of the most common causes of breathing problems is Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, or COPD, which is a group of diseases that includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

Dr. Anne Wheaton is an epidemiologist with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. She's joining us today to discuss the causes of and treatments for COPD. Welcome to the show, Anne.

[Dr. Wheaton] Thank you, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Anne, how common is COPD in the US?

[Dr. Wheaton] Over 12 million Americans have been diagnosed with COPD, but an additional 12 million people may have COPD and not know it.

[Dr. Gaynes] What causes it?

[Dr. Wheaton] Most cases of COPD in the United States are caused by smoking tobacco, however, one in six people with COPD have never smoked. COPD may also be caused by long term exposure to other lung irritants, such as dust, chemicals, or fumes, either at home or at work. And finally, in some cases, COPD is caused by a relatively rare genetic condition.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the symptoms of COPD?

[Dr. Wheaton] Respiratory symptoms include constant coughing, which is sometimes called 'smoker's cough,' excess phlegm, or mucous, production; wheezing; feeling like you can't breathe; not being able to take a deep breath; and finally, shortness of breath while doing activities you used to be able to do.

[Dr. Gaynes] How is COPD treated?

[Dr. Wheaton] It's important to note that, although there is no cure for COPD, it's important to treat it. Treatment can improve symptoms, reduce flare-ups, and improve quality of life. Common COPD medications, such as bronchodilators and

corticosteroids, make it easier to breathe by relaxing the muscles around your airways or by fighting inflammation of the airways. Pulmonary rehabilitation and physical activity training can help patients with COPD remain active. In more severe cases of COPD, oxygen treatment or surgery may be recommended.

[Dr. Gaynes] Anne, how can a person decrease their chances of getting COPD?

[Dr. Wheaton] The most important thing is not to smoke, but if you are a smoker, smoking cessation, quitting smoking, is very important. Also, you can reduce exposure to air pollutants in the home, such as second-hand smoke, and people who are exposed to dust, chemicals, or fumes at work should always use the proper protective equipment.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about COPD?

[Dr. Wheaton] Listeners can go to www.cdc.gov/copd.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Anne. I've been talking today with Dr. Anne Wheaton of CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion about the respiratory condition known as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, or COPD .

Remember, smoking is the leading cause of COPD. Other factors that might contribute include air pollutants in the home and workplace and respiratory infections. If you're having breathing problems, see your health care provider.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.