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## **COPD AND ASTHMA** by Dr. Dana Kissner, MD

Symptoms such as shortness of breath, coughing, and wheezing might seem like asthma, but they can also be signs of another common lung disease called chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD. Also known as emphysema or chronic bronchitis, COPD is a disease where the lungs are slowly and sometimes permanently damaged by breathing in fumes and other toxic substances. It is a serious illness and is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States and throughout the world.

COPD and asthma have very similar symptoms and treatments, but are very different diseases. With asthma, the lungs are very sensitive. When they come in contact with a trigger such as pollen or animal dander, the airways in the lungs swell, produce mucus, and narrow, making it difficult to breathe. With treatment, an asthma episode is reversible. The airways relax and the swelling goes down. Asthma is usually identified during childhood or adolescence, but it can start at any time.

COPD is different. Like a balloon, a healthy lung can expand with inhaled air and contract easily to exhale the air for an entire lifetime. With COPD, the airways in the lungs begin to lose their elasticity and ability to spring back into shape. Airways collapse and air becomes trapped inside the lungs, which means that less air can get out. Airways can swell and become plugged with mucus. COPD takes many years to develop. It is mostly diagnosed in older adults who have a history of smoking and usually have no history of allergies or asthma. The lungs are usually permanently damaged by the time you start to notice symptoms. Also, patients with COPD are more likely to have daily symptoms that can get worse without treatment. Treatments for both diseases use bronchodilators or quick-relief inhalers, inhaled steroids, and working with a respiratory therapist. There are some differences, however, between COPD and asthma therapies.

For both diseases, if you smoke, it is important that you stop immediately and stay away from people who are smoking. It is also important for you to visit your doctor at least twice a year, even when you are feeling well, to make sure that you are taking your medication correctly, to take a pulmonary function test to monitor your progress, and to get an annual flu shot. Stay away from strong smelling cleaning products and air fresheners and keep your windows closed on high pollution days. You should exercise regularly and try to eat lots of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains to keep your body healthy and strong.

Finally, watch out for signs of a breathing emergency. For both diseases, you should call 911, if, even after taking your medications, you find that it is hard to talk, your lips or fingernails are gray or blue, and you are having a hard time concentrating.

COPD, like asthma, cannot be cured. With the proper medical care, patients with asthma can often be treated and live symptom free. COPD patients may always have a few symptoms, but with treatment, they can improve their symptoms, slow the damage to their lungs, and breathe easier.

Sources: Diseases and Conditions Index: COPD [Internet]. Rev.ed National Heart Lung and Blood Institute (US); 2007 Dec. Available from: [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Copd/Copd\\_all.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Copd/Copd_all.html)

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Also known as emphysema or chronic bronchitis, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a disease where the lungs are slowly and sometimes permanently damaged by breathing in fumes and other toxic substances.



- ❄ COPD is the 4th leading cause of death in the U.S. and causes serious, long-term disability.
- ❄ COPD kills more than 120,000 Americans each year.
- ❄ More than 12 million people are currently diagnosed with COPD.
- ❄ An additional 12 million likely have COPD and don't even know it.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, NHLBI's COPD Awareness and Education Campaign



## ASK AN ASTHMA EDUCATOR



Guest AE-C, Karla Stoermer  
Grossman, BSN, RN, AE-C

*What exactly is a certified asthma educator? And how can they help me?*

-Latrice

A Certified Asthma Educator (AE-C) is a person that focuses on teaching other people about asthma. In order to be a Certified Asthma Educator, you need to be a licensed health care professional (like a nurse, respiratory specialist or pharmacist) or someone that has been doing asthma education for at least 1,000 hours (or about 6 months, working full-time.) To become a Certified Asthma Educator you have to take an exam that tests how much you know both about asthma and how people learn best.

The goal of the asthma educator is to give you the information you need to take care of your asthma or your child's asthma. They will teach you what is happening in your lungs; show you how to take your medications the right way; why you need to take your medications daily; and teach you how to treat an asthma attack. The asthma educator will help you understand your asthma action plan so that you know exactly what to do when you are well and when you are having an asthma attack.

In Michigan, we are very lucky to have quite a few Certified Asthma Educators throughout the state who work with many of the local asthma coalitions. For more information about a local asthma coalitions, please visit [www.GetAsthmaHelp.org](http://www.GetAsthmaHelp.org) or call 1-866-EZ LUNG. You can also visit [www.naecb.org](http://www.naecb.org) for more information about Certified Asthma Educators and information on how to become certified yourself. ❄️

Support the American Lung Association of Michigan in May...to find a Blow the Whistle on Asthma Walk near you, call 1-800-Lung USA or visit [www.asthmawalk.org](http://www.asthmawalk.org)



Please direct questions and comments about this newsletter to:

MI Asthma Communication Network  
c/o American Lung Assoc. of Michigan  
403 Seymour Avenue  
Lansing, MI 48933-1179  
phone: 1-866-395-8647  
e-mail: [info@GetAsthmaHelp.org](mailto:info@GetAsthmaHelp.org)

## WINTER ASTHMA TIPS: New Year Resolutions

If you happen to smoke, the start of the New Year is a great time to quit. Heart disease, lung cancer, and COPD due to smoking isn't just limited to those who light up, but to everyone exposed to their secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke alone contains over 4,000 substances, more than 69 of which are known or suspected to cause cancer. And according to the 2006 US Surgeon General Report, "The scientific evidence shows that there is no "safe" level of exposure to secondhand smoke."



While there is no one right way to quit, here are some tips that might help:

- 1) Check out your local resources, such as the American Lung Association ([alam.org](http://alam.org)). They have tools that can help.
- 2) Set a quit date and mark it on your calendar. Keep track of your progress.
- 3) Create a support system. Your family and friends can help you stay on track.
- 4) If you have a relapse, it's okay. Just try again!

By quitting, your health can immediately improve. Your risk for cancer decreases, and former smokers live longer than continuing smokers. You can protect your family and yourself from serious health consequences. ❄️

## ADVOCACY UPDATE

In Mid-December, the Michigan State House approved legislation for Smoke free workplaces. This is the first step to making all restaurants and bars in Michigan free from smoke. The bill was then forwarded to the Government Operations and Reforms Committee, headed by Senate Majority Leader, Mike Bishop.

This bill needs your help. Contact your senator and Mike Bishop's office and tell them that you want to see a smoke free Michigan. With your help and your personal stories, we can all make a difference in protecting the health of employees and our families from secondhand smoke. Visit [senate.michigan.gov](http://senate.michigan.gov) to find your senator's contact information.

## MI ASTHMA CALENDAR

### February

- 23 ALAM Climb Michigan - Grand Rapids, JW Marriott Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids, \$40 registration fee, must pre-register, for more info: 1-800 LUNG USA or [www.alam.org](http://www.alam.org).
- 24 ALAM Climb Michigan - Detroit, Marriott Renaissance Center, Detroit, \$40 registration fee, must pre-register, for more info: 1-800 LUNG USA or [www.alam.org](http://www.alam.org)

### March

- 1 Emerging Science in Asthma & Allergy Management Annual Conference, Dispatch Conference Center, Livonia, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., \$25 registration fee, for more info: 888-444-0333 or [www.aafamich.org/Events.html](http://www.aafamich.org/Events.html).
- 14- AAAAI Annual Meeting
- 18 Philadelphia, PA, for more info: [www.aaaai.org/members/annual\\_meeting/am2008](http://www.aaaai.org/members/annual_meeting/am2008)

- 31 MSRC 2008 Spring Conference, Amway Grand Plaza Hotel & DeVos Place, Grand Rapids, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., for more info: 517-677-6772.

### April

- 15 Summit of Michigan Asthma Coalitions, Lansing Community College-West Campus, Lansing, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., free, but must pre-register, for more info: 517-484-7206.