



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

COPD Awareness

National Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Awareness Month – November 2017

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

[Dr. Kathleen Dooling] 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. Kathleen Dooling.

For millions of Americans, just taking a breath can be a strenuous task. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, is a group of diseases that block airflow and make breathing difficult.

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

[Dr. Wheaton] Hi. Thanks for having me.

[Dr. Dooling] Anne, what is COPD?

[Dr. Wheaton] COPD's not a single disease, but actually a group of respiratory conditions, and it includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis. Emphysema's a condition that makes it hard for you to exhale, and chronic bronchitis is a result of chronic inflammation that makes it hard to inhale and exhale, and it progresses over time.

[Dr. Dooling] How common is COPD in the U.S.?

[Dr. Wheaton] Sixteen million Americans have been diagnosed with COPD, but millions more have it and just don't know it.

[Dr. Dooling] What causes COPD?

[Dr. Wheaton] Most COPD in the United States is caused by tobacco smoke, but about a quarter of COPD patients have never smoked. COPD may also be caused by industrial fumes or other air pollution, including second hand smoke. In a small percentage of COPD cases, it's caused by a genetic disorder.

[Dr. Dooling] What are the most common symptoms?

[Dr. Wheaton] Symptoms include chronic cough, sometimes called "Smoker's Cough," especially with excess phlegm or mucous; shortness of breath; or wheezing. These symptoms can have a significant impact on patient's daily activities. People with COPD may have trouble just

running errands or walking or climbing stairs. In addition to these chronic symptoms, patients periodically experience flare-ups when symptoms get more severe than usual and could even mean a trip to the hospital. If these symptoms sound familiar, especially if you're a smoker or used to smoke, it's very important to visit your doctor and have a breathing test, it's called spirometry, done to confirm a diagnosis.

[Dr. Dooling] How is COPD treated?

[Dr. Wheaton] Prevention's the best treatment, and since most COPD is caused by smoking tobacco, quitting smoking, or better yet, never smoking in the first place, are the best ways to avoid developing COPD. And there's no cure for COPD. However, there are several things patients can do to slow the progression of COPD and control symptoms. Smokers should make every effort to quit smoking. For help quitting, visit smokefree.gov. Just because you've already developed COPD doesn't mean it's too late to quit. Quitting can slow the progression of COPD and may mean fewer symptoms or flare-ups which could mean less chance of having to go to the hospital. A very important aspect of COPD treatment for all COPD patients is pulmonary rehabilitation, or pulmonary rehab, and it combines patient education, learning breathing techniques, and exercise training to improve your quality of life. These personalized plans help manage your symptoms and improve your stamina. There're also medications available to treat COPD, but it's important to follow your doctor's instructions. So if your doctor tells you to take a medication every day, don't skip a dose because you feel okay that day. And if COPD causes low blood oxygen levels, your doctor may also prescribe supplemental oxygen from a portable oxygen tank. Finally, respiratory infections can trigger a flare-up of symptoms, so certain vaccines, such as flu or pneumococcal vaccines, are recommended for people with COPD.

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

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

[Dr. Dooling] Thanks, Anne. I've been talking today with Dr. Anne Wheaton about the causes of and treatment for COPD.

If you or someone you know is experiencing breathing problems, talk to your health care provider. Early diagnosis is key to successful treatment.

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

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