

Asthma, COPD and Allergies

How to Tell the Difference



Both asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) make it hard to breathe, but they are different. Sometimes, allergies like pollen or pet dander can make it even harder to tell them apart. If you or someone you know has trouble breathing or wheezes, it's important to see a doctor to find out what's wrong and get the right treatment.

Common Symptoms

- Shortness of breath
- Trouble breathing during exercise
- Tightness or pain in the chest
- Wheezing
- Coughing (with asthma, the cough is usually dry; with COPD, it's usually from mucus)

Asthma

Affects younger people

Not a major cause of death

Triggered by allergies, colds, air pollution, weather changes and exercise

Symptoms come and go

COPD

Includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis

Affects older people, usually those who smoke or used to smoke

One of the top 10 causes of death in the U.S.

Triggered by respiratory infections, air pollution, allergies, extreme temperatures and exercise

Symptoms occur all the time and get worse over time



Making the Right Diagnosis

- Keep a diary of symptoms and what makes them worse
- See a lung doctor (pulmonologist) who will ask about your medical history and listen to your lungs
- Ask about a lung function test (spirometry) to see how well your lungs are working



A **pulmonologist** is a doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating respiratory diseases, which affect the lungs and airways.



Breathing Easier

Treatments can help you breathe better. Depending on whether you have asthma or COPD, treatments may include inhalers and other medications. For both, it's important to:

- Quit smoking
- Identify and avoid triggers
- Stay up to date with vaccines
- Exercise
- Manage other health conditions