MetLife | Return to Health

COPD and Asthma

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD): A group of lung diseases including emphysema and chronic bronchitis that block airflow in the lungs.[1]

Asthma: A chronic disease involving the airways in the lungs that allow air to come in and out of the lungs.[2]



Pulmonary diseases can affect the ability of air to get through the bronchial tubes into the lungs (asthma) and/or the ability of the lungs to expand and contract to allow air to move in and out (COPD).[1]

Treatment

Inhaled and/or oral medications (inhalers/nebulizers, steroids) are administered to help open the airways and reduce inflammation.

General Precautions:

COPD: Avoid inhaled irritants, very cold or very hot air, tolerance for physical exertion may be limited.[3]

Asthma: Avoid triggers such as fumes or dust, use preventive medications before strenuous activity or exposure to other triggers such as allergens if unavoidable.[2]

*The severity or progression of disease will impact symptoms, response to treatment and recovery time following a “flare-up” of both conditions.



What can employers do? [1,2,3]

- Recognize that having the diagnosis of COPD or asthma does not preclude an employee from being a productive member of your team.
- Keep the lines of **communication** open to discuss respiratory issues and work together to strategize.
- Involve the treating health care provider to document restrictions or recommendations.
- In a production setting, are there options to offer shift changes for an employee to work when it is not as warm or cold (factory settings that are not climate controlled)? Can areas that may contain more fumes or dust benefit from additional air filtration devices?
- In an **office setting,** can an accommodation be made that would allow for oxygen to be used in the work environment if needed (usually provided via a concentrator and not oxygen tanks)? Can additional ventilation be provided to the work area or is there an alternative work area free from odors, perfumes, or chemicals?

The information contained herein is for purely informational purposes only, and is not intended to present medical, occupational, or therapeutic advice

1. Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. (n.d.) Accessed May 2023 from MDGuidelines: https://app.mdguidelines.com/health-advisor/mda%2Fchronic-obstructive-pulmonary-disease
2. Asthma Facts and Figures. (2020, April). Accessed May 2023 from AAFA (Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America): https://www.aafa.org/asthma-facts/
3. Basics About COPD (2024, May 15). Accessed May 2023 from CDC: https://www.cdc.gov/copd/about/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/copd/basics-about.html

L5415986[exp0528][All States and][All Territories] © 2026 MetLife Services and Solutions, LLC