



## ASTHMA VS. COPD: WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES?

Asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are conditions that affect the lungs. Both involve airway swelling that makes it difficult to breathe. However, they have different causes and treatments, so it's important for people with lung issues to understand the difference between asthma and COPD.

One important distinction in the conversation of asthma vs. COPD is what causes airway swelling. In asthma, substances like pollen or mold and physical activity can create inflammation. COPD is an umbrella term for a group of lung conditions that include chronic bronchitis and **emphysema**, most of which have smoking as their primary cause.

As you learn more about COPD vs. asthma, the differences become more apparent.

# ARE ASTHMA AND COPD THE SAME?

Asthma and COPD can both cause severe respiratory symptoms, but they're not the same disease. What's the difference between asthma and COPD?

In addition to the difference in causes (activity or environmental irritants for asthma vs. smoking for COPD), the two diseases differ in how they progress. Asthma comes on in "attacks" that occur and then subside. The attacks may vary in severity, but they don't tend to get progressively worse.

**COPD**, on the other hand, is a progressive disease — meaning it gets worse over time. COPD causes changes to the airways, including causing tiny air sacs in the lungs to become less stretchy. These changes continue to worsen, making it increasingly difficult to breathe. The fact that COPD progresses is a major difference between COPD and asthma.

## ASTHMA VS. COPD COMPARISON CHART

The table below provides an overview of asthma vs. COPD.

	Asthma	COPD
Description	Asthma is a condition that causes lung inflammation that makes it hard to breathe. Symptoms come and go.	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a progressive lung disease that inhibits airflow and breathing.
Symptoms	Episodes of shortness of breath; dry cough; chest tightness; spasms in lung bronchioles	Progressively worsening morning cough with phlegm; spasms in lung bronchioles; decreasing airflow
Risk Factors	Allergies; rhinitis; eczema	Smoking; asthma
Triggers	Allergens; exercise; cold air	Influenza, pneumonia, and other respiratory tract infections; air pollution
Presentation	Typically occurs in younger patients	Typically occurs in older patients who smoke or previously smoked
Diagnosis	Physical exam; medical history	CT scans; spirometry
Treatment	Bronchodilators; inhaled corticosteroids; oral steroids	Bronchodilators; pulmonary treatments; oxygen; hospitalization
Lifestyle Changes	Stop smoking; avoid air pollution; avoid allergens	Stop smoking; avoid air pollution