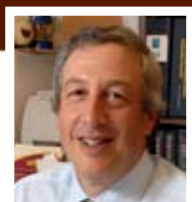


# Breathe: Taking control of COPD



**Meyer Balter, MD**

FRCPC, Director, Asthma Education Clinic and Director, Internal Medicine Residency Training Program, Mount Sinai Hospital, Toronto

Chronic obstruction pulmonary disease (COPD) is a progressive disease of the lungs that makes breathing more difficult over time. It was traditionally considered a disease of men, but according to Dr. Meyer Balter, a leading expert on COPD, "there are now more women in Canada with COPD than men and for the first time ever, two years ago, more women died in Canada of COPD than men. And the reason is cigarette smoke."

Dr. Balter says that, "the impact of COPD is tremendous and it varies from emotional side effects, such as having depression and anxiety, to the predictable physical side effects of losing lung function." He believes that early diagnosis is an important step to managing the disease.

"We have medications that will improve the patient's quality of life, decrease their shortness of breath and improve their exercise tolerance. We have exercise rehabilitation programs that greatly improve patient's quality of life, and we have various vaccination strategies to prevent infection and again improve patient's quality of life, and shorten or slow down the rate of decline of their lung function."

COPD is frequently punctuated by exacerbations or flare-ups, which Dr. Balter says, "have quite significant consequences." Exacerbations can lead to hospitalization, disability and even death.<sup>1</sup> He advises anyone who experiences a flare up to seek medical advice. "By slowing down or decreasing the frequency of the lung attacks, you slow down the rate of decline of lung function, thereby not only improving the quality of life, but perhaps improving survival as well."

## SYMPTOMS OF COPD

- **Chronic cough**
- **Shortness of breath**
- **Wheezing**

If you have any of these symptoms, speak to your doctor.

## SIGNS SUGGESTIVE OF A COPD FLARE-UP (LUNG ATTACK)<sup>1</sup>

- **Increased cough**
- **Increased shortness of breath**
- **Development of yellow or green tinged phlegm**

To view "Breathe: Taking control of COPD" with Dr. Balter, go to [www.celebratingwomentv.ca](http://www.celebratingwomentv.ca) & [www.healthandfamily.ca](http://www.healthandfamily.ca).





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This campaign is sponsored by an unrestricted educational grant from Canadian research-based pharmaceutical companies.

<sup>1</sup> Canadian Lung Association: COPD. Accessed March 31, 2011, at: [http://www.lung.ca/diseases-maladies/copd-mpoc/flareups-pousseesactives/index\\_e.php](http://www.lung.ca/diseases-maladies/copd-mpoc/flareups-pousseesactives/index_e.php)