COPD

COPD is a group of lung diseases that block airflow, making it difficult to breathe. According to the Mayo Clinic, COPD affects the lungs as follows:

- Air travels down your windpipe (trachea), into your lungs through two large tubes (bronchi). Inside your lungs, these tubes divide many times, like the branches of a tree, into many smaller tubes (bronchioles) that end in clusters of tiny air sacs (alveoli). The air sacs have very thin walls full of tiny blood vessels (capillaries). The oxygen in the air you inhale passes into these blood vessels and enters your bloodstream. At the same time, carbon dioxide, a gas that is a waste product of metabolism, is exhaled.

An individual's lungs rely on the natural elasticity of the bronchial tubes and air sacs to force air out of the body. COPD can cause them to lose this natural elasticity and partially collapse.

Emphysema and chronic bronchitis are the two most common conditions that make up COPD.

- Emphysema is a disease that destroys the walls and elastic fibers of the alveoli. In addition, airflow from the lungs is impaired due to small airways that collapse when exhaling.

- Chronic bronchitis a condition that causes inflammation in the bronchial tubes. At the same time, the lungs may produce more mucus which can further block the inflamed tubes. A chronic cough can develop while trying to clear the airways. Generally, lung damage caused by COPD cannot be reversed, but there are treatments that may help control symptoms and potentially minimize future damage.

Source:
http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/copd/basics/definition/CON-20032017 (Accessed 7/29/14)
http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/copd/basics/causes/con-20032017 (Accessed 7/29/14)

Symptoms of COPD

Generally, the common symptoms of COPD don't appear until after there has already been significant lung damage and symptoms usually worsen over time. Some common symptoms of COPD may include:

- Shortness of breath
- Persistent cough
- Chronic cough that produces clear, white, yellow or greenish mucus
- Wheezing
- Chest tightness
- Lack of energy
- Blue lips or fingernails

If the person's symptoms are worsening, call the franchise office immediately.

Source:
http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/copd/basics/symptoms/con-20032017 (Accessed 7/30/14)

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COPD

Tips to Helping a Shortness of Breath Attack

If the person with COPD is having a coughing attack or shortness of breath, she may panic, which may cause the attack to continue. Some suggestions if this happens: * Help the person sit up.

- Ask her to lean forward slightly, with her hands or elbows on her knees.

- Gently and slowly rub her back, from the small of the back to the neckline.

- Encourage the person to breathe in through the nose and blow out through the mouth.

- Reassure using a soft tone.

Complications of COPD

Some complications of COPD may include:

- **Respiratory infections -** People with COPD can be more susceptible to sickness, such as colds, the flu and pneumonia. Because of this, there may be increased difficulty breathing or damage to the lung tissue, from any respiratory infection an individual with COPD might contract. A person with COPD can help prevent these additional respiratory infections by receiving an annual flu vaccination and regular vaccination against pneumococcal pneumonia.

- **High blood pressure -** COPD may cause pulmonary hypertension (high blood pressure) in the arteries that bring blood to the lungs.

- **Heart problems -** COPD may increase the risk of heart disease, including heart attacks.

- **Lung cancer -** Generally, individuals who smoke and also have chronic bronchitis may have a greater risk of developing lung cancer than smokers without it.

- **Depression -** A person may not be able to fully partake in activities she enjoys due to difficulty breathing. Additionally, dealing with serious illness may contribute to development of depression.

- **Exacerbations -** An individual may experience times when symptoms are worse for days or weeks, known as exacerbations. An exacerbation, if untreated, could lead to lung failure. Exacerbations may be caused by a respiratory infection, air pollution or other triggers of inflammation.

Sources:
http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/copd/basics/complications/con-20032017 (Accessed 6/17/14) http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/copd/basics/treatment/con-20032017 (Accessed 8/5/2014)

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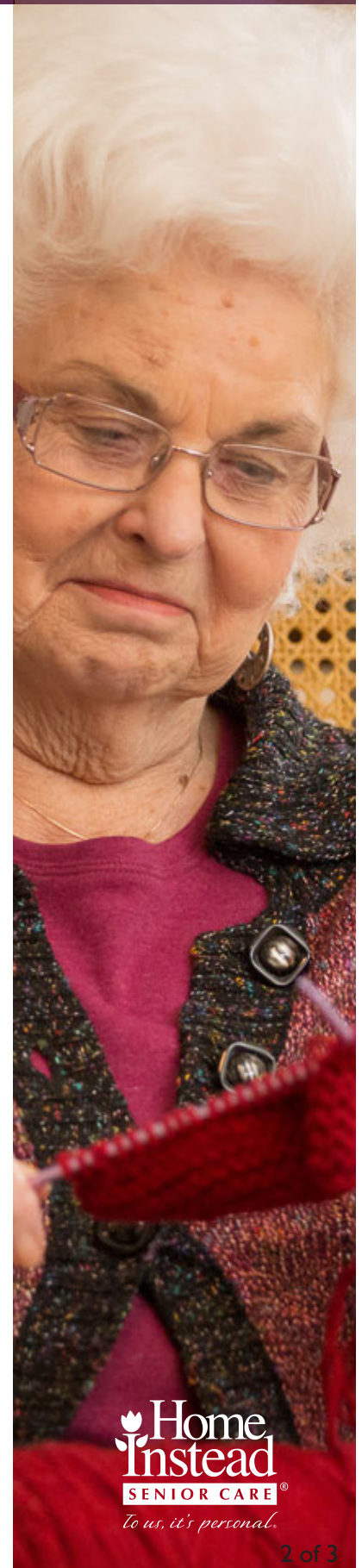
Treatment for COPD

COPD can be treated with medication, however, one of the most important steps in a person's COPD treatment plan is to stop smoking. According to the Mayo Clinic, it is the only way to keep COPD from worsening.

A doctor may also prescribe lung therapies like oxygen therapy and a pulmonary rehabilitation program.

Surgery may also be an option for people with some forms of severe emphysema who are not finding relief with medications alone.

An individual with COPD may find that doing the regular activities she enjoys are difficult, but that doesn't mean she has to stop doing them. Encouraging the person to follow a healthcare professional's treatment plan and to make some simple changes in diet and exercise, can help to continue her normal routine and interests.
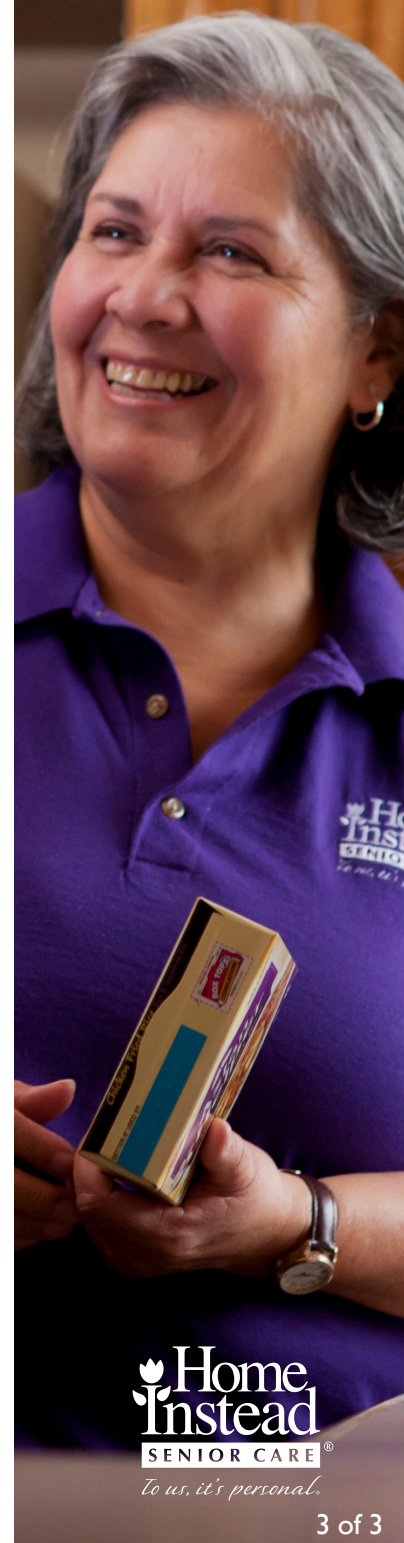
Source:
http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/copd/basics/treatment/con-20032017 (Accessed 8/5/14)

Role of a CAREGiver

Supporting the Individual

- Encourage the client to exercise regularly, following her physician's instructions. Exercise can improve the individual's strength and endurance, and strengthen the respiratory muscles.

- Plan and prepare healthy meals.

- Avoid air pollution, including secondhand smoke.

- Provide transportation to medical appointments.

- Be patient. It may take longer to complete tasks.

- Plan appropriate activities. A person with COPD may not be able to go for long walks without frequent breaks.

- Protect the individual from contagious illnesses. Wash your hands frequently and encourage the person with COPD to do the same. Avoid close contact with people who have a cold or influenza.