COPD – also known as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease – is a lung problem that goes by many names: smoker’s cough, emphysema and chronic bronchitis to name a few. But no matter what you call it, the result is the same – breathing trouble.

COPD is a serious lung disease that makes it hard to breathe. It causes people to get very sick and can make a person unable to work or do everyday tasks. More than 12 million people have been told by a doctor that they have COPD. And 12 million more people don’t even know they have it.

People over the age of 40 who smoke or used to smoke have a higher risk for COPD. So do people who have worked or lived around chemicals or fumes. Some of the symptoms of COPD include:

- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- A cough that won’t go away
- Feeling like you can’t breathe
- Trouble taking a deep breath
- Getting tired easily when doing simple tasks like walking, climbing stairs, bathing, dressing or doing chores

If you have any of these symptoms, it’s best to talk to your doctor.* He or she can tell you for sure if it’s COPD or something else.

COPD can’t be cured, but there are some things you can do to help control it and live a more active life:

- Stop smoking. It’s one of the best things you can do to avoid more damage to your lungs. Talk with your doctor about ways to quit.
- Avoid harmful fumes and strong chemicals that can irritate your lungs. Stay away from cigarette smoke and wood fires. And stay indoors when the air quality outside isn’t good.
- Get a flu and pneumonia shot if your doctor tells you to. Both illnesses can cause problems for people with COPD.
- Follow your doctor’s care plan. Take medicines as directed and see your doctor when he or she advises, even when you’re feeling fine. Before each visit, make a list of any symptoms or problems you are having, as well as any medicines you’re taking. Bring the list with you to share with your doctor.

*Your doctor or other health care provider you may see for medical care and advice.

Certain factual or statistical information was derived from the following source: