



SENIOR HEALTH

# Emphysema

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Emphysema, a type of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), is a chronic, irreversible but preventable disease. It occurs when the tiny air sacs (alveoli) of the lungs are damaged and lose their elasticity. The bronchial tubes become swollen and inflamed and the lungs begin to deflate or spring shut.

Emphysema develops gradually over years. The majority of people who have this disease are or were smokers. The first symptom of emphysema is usually shortness of breath during exertion. As the disease progresses, the shortness of breath increases and even speaking more than a few words at a time can be difficult. Low oxygen levels, due to the lungs' inability to absorb oxygen, can turn lips and fingers blue. The heart becomes burdened trying to maintain circulation, and heart failure is a common result. Each year more than 50,000 people die or are handicapped from emphysema. Unfortunately, emphysema can't be cured, but there are treatments available to help slow the progression of the disease.



### **HOW TO REDUCE YOUR RISK**

- If you smoke, quit now; if you don't, never start.
- Avoid exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke.
- Avoid exposure to other environmental pollutants.