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December 14, 2012

Take My Breath Away – Is it Asthma or COPD?

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and asthma are chronic lung conditions that are alike in many aspects but they also differ in several key ways. COPD is a progressive disease that is two conditions: chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Asthma is a separate disease characterized by swollen airways.

Both COPD and asthma cause difficulty breathing. Although there is no cure for either, treatment focuses on relieving symptoms and making breathing easier. In both cases, a bronchodilator often is used to help open the airways. Long-term inhaled steroids also may help control symptoms.

The main cause of COPD is smoking cigarettes. However, long-term exposure to secondhand smoke or pollution also can lead to the disease. The cause of asthma is unknown, but it tends to run in families. People with COPD generally breathe less air in and out because of permanent damage to the lungs. But with asthma, symptoms usually occur after exposure to allergens (such as pet dander and mold), irritants (such as cigarette smoke and air pollution), exercise, and certain infections.

COPD develops slowly. It can take years for symptoms to appear, which is why it's typically diagnosed in middle-aged or older people. Asthma, on the other hand, usually begins in childhood, although it can emerge in adulthood.

However, more than 7 million children and teens have asthma, making it the most common chronic condition for children. Asthma is the leading cause of missed school days and a leading cause of hospitalization. But with the proper management and the right medication, children with asthma can do just about anything they want to do.

To find more about recognizing asthma symptoms and to watch videos about children and teens learning to manage their asthma visit [Be Smart.Be Well](#).

Sources: American Lung Association; National Lung Blood and Heart Association; Be Smart. Be Well.

