

Understanding the Risks as a Woman with COPD

Once considered a “man’s disease,” chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, is increasingly affecting women.



The Gender Gap in Diagnosis

Women are often misdiagnosed or diagnosed at later stages due to outdated perceptions that COPD doesn’t affect women.

But in reality, among people with COPD who have never smoked, 80% are women. In fact, women are more likely than men to develop lung conditions, such as asthma and COPD.

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Why Are Women More Susceptible to COPD?

Biological and hormonal factors contribute to women’s increased vulnerability to COPD.



Women’s **smaller airways** make them more vulnerable to lung injury.



Hormonal changes, particularly early menopause, may increase risk.



Reproductive factors, such as the number of pregnancies and the age at first menstruation, may influence susceptibility.



Women are less likely than men to receive **spirometry testing** for an accurate diagnosis.



Health Risks Beyond COPD

The under-recognition of COPD symptoms in women often leads to delayed diagnosis and worsening disease. In addition, women are at higher risk for:



Depression



Anxiety



Osteoporosis



Smoking and COPD: A Different Risk for Women

Smoking is a well-known risk factor for COPD, but its impact differs between men and women. Due to smaller lung size, women may experience greater harm from the same amount of cigarette exposure.

Women make up the largest group of non-smokers living with COPD. Nearly 30% of women with COPD have never smoked, compared to fewer than 10% of men. Broader awareness about all risk factors is needed for women.

Raising awareness of the unique risks women face with COPD is essential for earlier diagnosis, better treatment and improved health outcomes.

