

Understanding Emphysema

With every breath you take, your lungs pull air and oxygen into your body. When you breathe out, the lungs push carbon dioxide out of your body.

Oxygen-rich air travels through a complex system of bronchial tubes and then into smaller tubes called bronchioles.

At the end of each bronchiole are tiny air sacs called alveoli. Each alveoli is wrapped in tiny blood vessels.

When you inhale or breathe in, oxygen moves out of the air sacs and into the blood vessels to send oxygen to your bloodstream throughout your body.

With emphysema, the alveoli are damaged and no longer stretch and shrink as you breathe. They can't bring in oxygen and they can't push carbon dioxide out of the lungs.

Once the air sacs are damaged, they cannot be replaced.

Emphysema causes shortness of breath and breathing problems that often get worse over time. Symptoms also include a cough with mucus.

Emphysema is a type of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). It is often caused by smoking.

If you are living with emphysema, talk to your doctor about a treatment plan that can help you breathe easier and feel better.