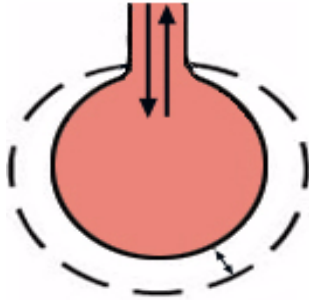


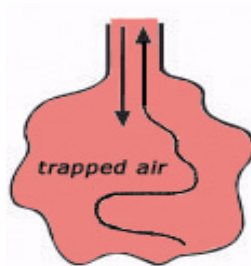
# Emphysema

## What is emphysema?

*Emphysema* is a lung disorder in which the healthy elastic sponge-like tissue is damaged and does not squeeze the air in and out properly. It is as though the lung tissue has become perished, similar to an old flabby football bladder or car tyre tube. This means that the air cannot move in and out of the air sacs easily. The elastic function of the lungs is lost. Air is life to the body, and if we cannot get our normal supply of oxygen into the blood from the lungs they have to work harder to circulate the air.



*The air sac in a normal lung*



*A damaged air sac with emphysema*

## What causes emphysema?

Emphysema is almost always caused by cigarette smoking. Emphysema is 13 times commoner in smokers than non-smokers.

There are other irritating things that can cause emphysema, although these are not as severe as smoking. These irritants include industrial fumes and dusts. Therefore damp mining and industrial towns are not good for people with chest troubles.

## How do cigarettes affect the lungs?

When cigarette smoke is inhaled, 80-90% remains in the lungs and causes irritation, increased mucus production and damage to the deep parts of the lungs. Eventually mucus and tar clog up the air tubes, causing chronic bronchitis and emphysema. If you continue to smoke, the problem will get worse. If you stop, the disease may stay steady and may even improve.

## What are the symptoms?

Shortness of breath that gets steadily worse is the main symptom. Other symptoms include smokers' cough, tiredness, weakness and difficulty clearing the chest.

## What are the risks of emphysema?

People are prone to chest infection, which continues the vicious cycle of lung disease. Such infections may lead to pneumonia. As emphysema gets worse it can cause heart failure and respiratory failure (where the lungs will not function).

## What is the treatment?

### Self-help

- If you smoke, you must stop.
- Avoid places with polluted air and other irritants, such as smoke, paint fumes and fine dust.
- Go for walks in clean, fresh air. (Keeping physically active is good for the lungs and heart.)
- Get adequate rest.
- Avoid contact with people who have colds and flu.

### Medical help

- Visit your doctor regularly for checkups and if you get a chest infection.
- If your chest is tight or wheezy, a bronchodilator spray may help.
- If you have a chest infection, antibiotics will help clear it up.
- Visit your doctor without delay if you get a cold or bronchitis, or start coughing up sputum.
- Annual influenza vaccination is recommended.