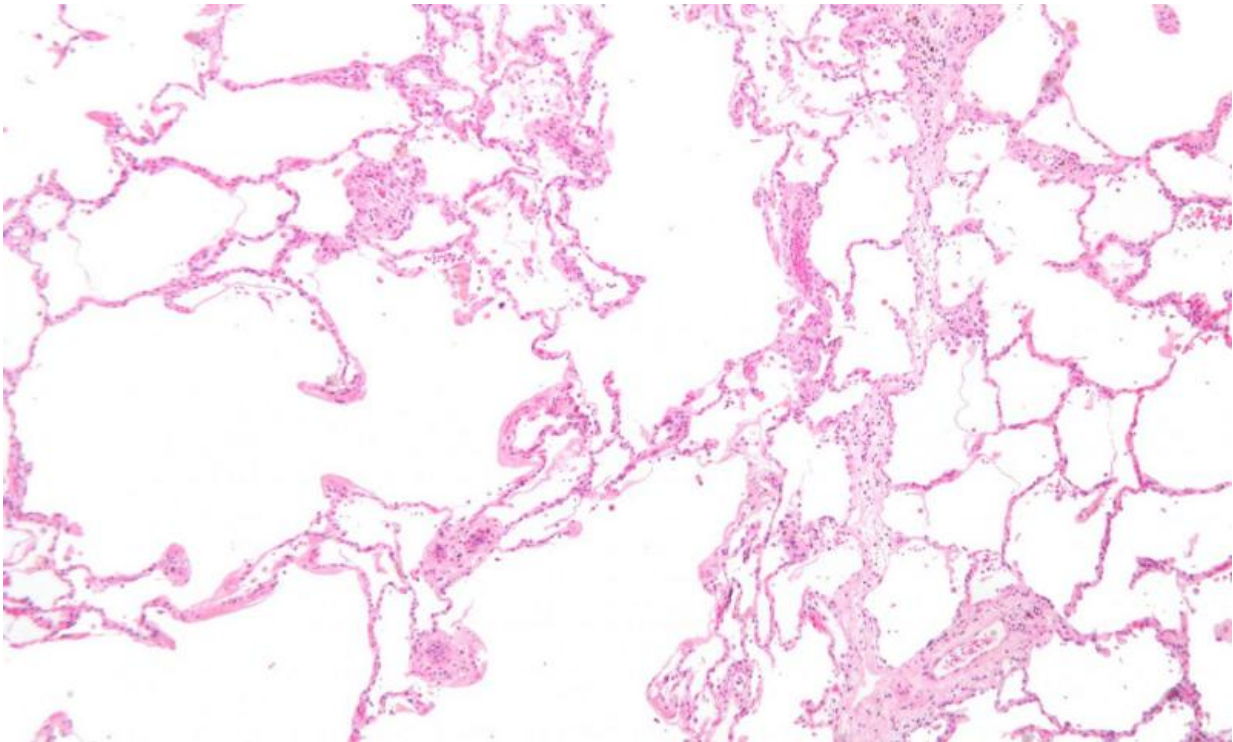


Quinn on Nutrition: Nutrition for lung disease

April 16 2021, by Barbara Quinn



Micrograph showing emphysema (left – large empty spaces) and lung tissue with relative preservation of the alveoli (right). Credit: Wikipedia, CC-BY-SA 3.0

My sister started smoking in her early 20s. She thought it would help her lose weight. Knowingly or unknowingly, that decision opened the door for her lifelong battle with cigarette addiction. Years later, when she was diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), she was

still unable to conquer the powerful pull to smoke "just one more cigarette."

Watching her struggle for every breath in her last years was difficult. According to the American Lung Association, cigarette smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals—many that are toxic to our air passages. Over time, the normal in-and-out breathing many of us take for granted becomes more and more difficult for a person with COPD.

Noxious particles in [cigarette smoke](#) also weaken the body's defenses against infections. My sister had all the classic symptoms: chronic cough, shortness of breath and frequent colds, flus and sinus infections.

The best and most effective way to prevent and treat COPD is to not smoke. But does nutrition have a role?

An in-depth analysis on the effects of diet on COPD was recently released by the Evidence Analysis Library of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Although many questions remain unanswered, some evidence shows that certain nutrition therapies can help stabilize a person with COPD:

Add extra calories to your diet if you are underweight. People with COPD who are able to increase their intake of calories often experience improved breathing, according to this recent analysis. Those who remain underweight are at the highest risk for complications.

Ask your doctor to check your vitamin D levels. It's a [blood test](#) called serum 25(OH)D. Low levels of vitamin D have been found to worsen the symptoms of COPD. A vitamin D supplement, if needed, may help improve lung function.

Consider a diet higher in fat. Adding healthful sources of fat to the diet

adds needed concentrated calories to a person who is too thin. And a higher fat diet was found in at least one study to help improve lung function in men with COPD. Healthful sources of fat include nuts and nut butters, avocados and vegetable oils.

Make sure your daily diet includes adequate amounts of protein. Protein is needed to maintain muscle mass and strength. Researchers have noted in some studies that higher intakes of protein may help improve a COPD patient's ability to breathe and function. High quality protein foods include fish, poultry, lean meat, eggs, dairy foods and soy.

Consult a registered dietitian nutritionist for individualized help with a therapeutic [diet](#). There is strong evidence that nutrition therapy can improve a COPD patient's weight, lung function and quality of life.

Tragically, my sister was not able overcome her smoking habit. For those who can, there is help to lessen the complications of chronic lung disease.

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