

# Chronic lung disease linked to cognitive impairment, memory loss

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A recent Mayo Clinic study found that people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are about twice as likely to develop mild cognitive impairment (MCI)—and chances are that it will include memory loss. The study was recently published in *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*.

Researchers looked at about 2,000 people 70-89 years old in the Mayo Clinic Study on Aging. About 1,600 were cognitively normal, 317 had mild cognitive impairment and overall, about 288 had COPD. COPD was found to be associated with almost two-fold higher odds of MCI, and the odds get worse the longer someone has COPD. Rates were similar among men and women.

Incidence of dementia progresses with age, and in the absence of any [effective therapy](#) for treatment or management of dementia/Alzheimer's disease, identification of risk factors is critical, says Balwinder Singh, M.D., first author of the study and a Mayo Clinic neurology research collaborator who is a psychiatry resident at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine & Health Sciences.

"COPD is reversible in early stages, especially in smokers," Dr. Singh says. "These findings are important because they highlight the importance of COPD as a potential risk factor for MCI and will hopefully lead to early intervention to prevent incidence or progression."

MCI is a stage between normal cognitive aging and dementia. People

with [mild cognitive impairment](#) are at increased risk of progressing to dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

COPD refers to a group of lung diseases that block airflow and make breathing difficult. Emphysema and chronic bronchitis are the two most common conditions that make up COPD. Chronic bronchitis is an inflammation of the lining of your bronchial tubes, which carry air to and from your lungs. Emphysema occurs when the air sacs (alveoli) at the end of the smallest air passages (bronchioles) in the lungs are gradually destroyed.

According to recent estimates, the cost of health care in 2012, including long-term care and hospice services, for individuals 65 years and older who had dementia was expected to be around \$200 billion.

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