

HEALTHY LIVING

Lung disease warning signs? Call the doctor

Q: I am a 49-year-old woman with “smoker’s cough.” I get winded climbing a single flight of stairs. Could these be warning signs of COPD?

A: “Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, is a non-contagious disease where passageways carrying air in and out of your lungs become partly obstructed, making it difficult to breathe,” says Juan Garcia, M.D., a board-certified specialist in Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine with Kelsey-Seybold Clinic. “When everyday physical functions are compromised by impaired breathing, you should consider COPD as the cause.”

COPD includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis and is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States. Warning signals, Dr. Garcia says, also include shortness of breath, wheezing, persistent cough and chest pain.

“In your case, be advised that cigarette smoking is, indeed, the most common cause of COPD,” says Dr. Garcia, who sees patients in his St. Luke’s Medical Tower office, Kelsey-Seybold’s Spring Medical and Diagnostic Center and Kelsey-Seybold’s Humble Clinic. “Pipe, cigar and other types of tobacco smoke can also cause COPD.”

Dr. Garcia warns that COPD is



JUAN
GARCIA, M.D.

an insidious disease, progressing gradually while stealing the victim’s breath in small increments.

“People often adapt their lifestyles, becoming less active, without realizing what’s happening to them,” he says.

Afflicting both genders, usually between ages 40 and 60, Dr. Garcia says he is seeing an increasing number of women patients with COPD.

“Unfortunately, COPD is traditionally underdiagnosed by primary care physicians,” Dr. Garcia says. “If you suspect it, consult a pulmonary specialist immediately because the lung damage caused by COPD is not reversible.

“Treatment can make you feel better and improve lung function.”

Call 713-442-7587 to schedule an appointment or to find a physician at Kelsey-Seybold Clinic.

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