Protecting Your Lungs

The lungs are different from most of the other organs in your body because their delicate tissues are directly connected to the outside environment. Anything you breathe in can affect your lungs. Germs, tobacco smoke and other harmful substances can cause damage to your airways and threaten the lungs ability to work properly.

Your body has a natural defense system designed to protect the lungs. This works very well most of the time to keep out dirt and fight off germs. But there are some important things you can do to reduce your risk of lung disease.

Don't smoke

Cigarette smoking is the major cause of COPD and lung cancer. Cigarette smoke can narrow the air passages and make breathing more difficult. It causes chronic inflammation or swelling in the lung. This can lead to chronic bronchitis. Over time cigarette smoke destroys lung tissue, and may trigger changes that grow into cancer. If you smoke and are ready to quit, the American Lung Association can help.

Avoid exposure to pollutants that can damage your lungs

Secondhand smoke, outdoor air pollution, chemicals in the home and workplace, and radon can all cause or worsen lung disease. Make your home and car smoke-free. Test your home for radon. Avoid exercising outdoors on bad air days. And talk to your healthcare provider if you are worried that something in your home, school or work may be making you sick. For more information about indoor and outdoor air pollution, click HERE.

Prevent infection

A cold or other respiratory infection can sometimes become very serious. There are several things you can do to protect yourself:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Alcohol-based cleaners are a good substitute if you cannot wash.
- Avoid crowds during the cold and flu season.
- Good oral hygiene can protect you from the germs in your mouth leading to infections. Brush your teeth at least twice a day and see your dentist at least every 6 months.
- Get vaccinated every year against influenza. Talk to your healthcare provider to find out if the pneumonia vaccine is right for you.
- If you get sick, keep it to yourself! Protect the people around you, including your loved ones, by keeping your distance. Stay home from work or school until you are feeling better.

Get regular health care

Regular check-ups are an important part of disease prevention, even when you are feeling well. This is especially true for lung disease, which sometimes goes undetected until it is serious. During a check-up, your healthcare provider will listen to your breathing and talk to you about any concerns you may have.