



Understanding Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis

Other Health Conditions and Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis

Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis (IPF) affects adults who are often over the age of 50. Although IPF is limited to the lungs, you may also have other health conditions that can impact your well-being. It is important to recognise and treat these other diseases, known as comorbidities, as they can influence your health and life expectancy. Some comorbidities can make IPF worse if they are not controlled.

Other common health conditions in people with IPF

In addition to IPF, you may also have high blood pressure (hypertension), high cholesterol, diabetes or osteoarthritis. These conditions are common in people over 50 years regardless of IPF and can be treated by your GP (although they may sometimes require specialist referral).

Other conditions that are associated with IPF include gastro-oesophageal reflux disease, obstructive sleep apnoea, feelings of anxiety and depression, cardiovascular disease and other lung diseases.



Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA)

OSA involves brief but repetitive obstruction in airflow during your sleep, and can cause daytime sleepiness, poor concentration and cardiovascular disease. If your treating doctor thinks you have OSA, you may need an overnight sleep study.

- If you have severe OSA, the recommended treatment is Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP), which involves wearing a tight-fitting mask while you sleep

- If you have milder OSA, specialised mouth guards may improve your sleep.
- Your treating doctor might also recommend weight loss and minimising alcohol consumption.

~60-90% OF PEOPLE WITH IPF HAVE OSA.



Gastro-oesophageal Reflux Disease (GORD)

GORD is common in people with IPF. There is also some evidence that reflux contributes to the progression of Pulmonary Fibrosis and causes acute exacerbation (flare-up of symptoms). If you suffer from GORD, there are a range of treatments that can help with the symptoms including acid-suppressing medications or even surgery.



You might find that avoiding certain foods and alcohol can help. You should eat meals well before bedtime and try raising the head of your bed. If your symptoms persist, you might need a referral to a gastroenterologist.



Feelings of anxiety and depression

People with IPF and their caregivers may develop feelings of anxiety and depression because of the impact of IPF on their life. IPF symptoms such as breathlessness may also trigger an anxious feeling.



If you notice you have a lot of negative feelings, it is important to discuss it with your friends and family as well as your GP and specialist doctor. They may suggest treatments to help alleviate symptoms or that you talk to a psychologist or psychiatrist.



Other lung conditions

Some people may have more than one lung problem. Cigarette smoking is a known risk factor for IPF as well as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). Asthma is also common in Australia and may coincide with IPF. These overlapping conditions may be detected on chest CT scans and lung-function tests. If you have asthma or COPD, you might need an inhaler, but it's important you realise that inhalers don't have any benefit for IPF alone.



Cardiovascular disease

This includes diseases such as high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, heart failure and stroke. Although these conditions are common in the general population, people with IPF may be at greater risk.

- If you are experiencing chest pain, heart palpitations or ankle swelling, your treating doctor will check if you have heart disease.
- If you have a family history of heart disease, are a former smoker, have diabetes or high cholesterol, it is recommended that you see a cardiologist.

Pulmonary Hypertension is another type of cardiovascular disease that involves increased blood pressure within the lungs, particularly in advanced IPF. It can be difficult to treat, but may be helped with supplemental oxygen.

If you have IPF, it's important to look after yourself and that includes making sure your other health conditions are well managed. Ensure you stay active, keep taking any medications or treatment recommended for your other health conditions and let your treating doctor know if there are any changes in your overall health, not just with your breathing.



FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Contact Lung Foundation Australia for more information, to access our support services and join our mailing list for regular updates and latest news.

Lung Foundation Australia Services

- Information and Support Team
- Lung disease information resources
- Education webinars
- Lung Cancer and Respiratory Support Nurses
- Support groups
- Peer-to-peer connections
- Referral to pulmonary rehabilitation and Lungs in Action exercise programs
- Inspired Living Newsletter

External Links

- Centre of Research Excellence in Pulmonary Fibrosis www.cre-pf.org.au
- Pulmonary Fibrosis Australasian Clinical Trials Network www.pact.lungfoundation.com.au
- Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation www.pulmonaryfibrosis.org
- Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation www.cpff.ca

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