



Not pretty pictures

The devastating effects of COPD are readily apparent — from the inside. Healthy adult lungs (left) have about 400 million microscopic, balloon-like air sacs called alveoli in which oxygen is absorbed and carbon dioxide discarded.



In lungs affected by COPD (right), alveoli lose their elasticity and break down. Airways that ventilate the alveoli also can collapse or become clogged from excess mucus-producing cells that line them. The alveolar aspect of COPD is called emphysema; chronic bronchitis refers to the airway component.