



Alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency: what to know

Thousands of people in the U.S. have alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency (AATD). But because the symptoms can mimic other health conditions, many people who have AATD are not diagnosed.

The Alpha-1 Foundation recommends that you should be tested for AATD if you have symptomatic fixed airflow obstruction – trouble breathing that doesn't respond to treatment¹

What is alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency?

AATD is an inherited health condition. People with AATD do not have enough of a protein called alpha-1 antitrypsin (AAT) in their blood. Produced by the liver, AAT helps protect the lungs from everyday irritants such as smoke, fumes, dust and pollen.

Without the protection of AAT, lungs can become damaged. This raises the risk of certain types of lung disease, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), especially for people who smoke. A small number of people have AAT-related liver or skin disease.

What are the signs and symptoms of AATD?

Any of the following symptoms can be a possible sign of AATD²:

- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Chronic bronchitis – coughing and phlegm production that last for a long time
- Chest colds that keep coming back
- Lower tolerance for exercise
- Year-round allergies
- Bronchiectasis – damage to the bronchial tubes in your lungs
- Associated liver problems

When should I talk with my doctor?

If you have any of the listed symptoms, talk with your doctor about getting tested. The test will take only a small sample of blood from your fingertip. Results usually come in less than two weeks. Your doctor might also suggest tests to check for lung or liver conditions.

How common is AATD?

AATD affects about 1 in every 2,500 people in the U.S.³

How is AATD treated?

AATD itself has no cure, but the lung conditions that it can cause have many treatments. These might include inhalers, steroids or supplemental oxygen.

What is augmentation therapy?

This is what your doctor might prescribe for you to replace the missing alpha-1 protein. Augmentation therapy is infused through a vein which raises the levels of the protein in your blood.

Where can I find more information?

- Alpha-1 Foundation: alpha1.org
- AlphaNet: alphanet.org
- American Lung Association: lung.org
- American Thoracic Society: thoracic.org



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Sources

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2. Alpha-1 Foundation. What is Alpha-1? The most common signs and symptoms of disease caused by Alpha-1. alpha1.org/what-is-alpha1. Accessed Dec. 22, 2022.
3. Alpha-1 Foundation. What is Alpha-1? Who gets Alpha-1 lung or liver disease? alpha1.org/what-is-alpha1. Accessed January 19, 2023.

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