



ATELECTASIS



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Collapse of lung tissue affecting part or all of one lung. It prevents normal lung function. Atelectasis can affect all ages, but is more common in children under age 10.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Sudden, major collapse:

- Chest pain.
- Shortness of breath; rapid breathing.
- Shock (weakness, pale skin, rapid heartbeat).
- Dizziness.

Gradual collapse:

- Cough.
- Fever.
- Shortness of breath.
- Sometimes, no symptoms are noticed.

CAUSES

- Obstructive atelectasis (most common type):

Thick mucous plugs from infection or other disease.

Inhaled objects, such as small toys or peanuts.

Surgery of the chest (thoracic) or abdomen.

- Nonobstructive atelectasis:

Pleural effusion (fluid in the lungs).

Pneumothorax (air in the area around the lung).

Tumors.

Lack of surfactant (a substance in the lungs).

Scarring of lung tissue (due to disease).

Trauma (injury) to the lung.

Enlarged lymph glands.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
- Obesity.
- Congenital lung disease, such as cystic fibrosis.
- Neuromuscular disease.
- Smoking.
- Asthma.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Medical care to help prevent post-surgical problems.
- Keep small objects that might be inhaled away from young children (such as peanuts).

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Outcome is generally good. It usually resolves with treatment. Complications are rare, but will depend on any underlying cause.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Infection and chronic lung damage.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam. Medical tests may include blood studies to measure oxygen and carbon dioxide levels, x-rays, or CT of the chest.
- Treatment depends on the cause. It may include drug therapy, chest physical therapy, bronchoscopy, and (rarely) surgery.
- Chest physical therapy may be done to help remove mucous from the lungs. It involves clapping, patting, and massaging the chest and back over the lungs. The lungs may be suctioned with a small plastic tube.
- Bronchoscopy may be done to remove foreign objects or a mucous plug. This involves using an instrument with a lighted tip to see inside the lungs.
- Disabling, chronic atelectasis may have to be treated with surgery to remove the affected part of the lung.
- A tumor may require surgery or radiation therapy.
- To learn more: American Lung Association, 61 Broadway, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10006; (800) 586-4872; website: www.lungusa.org.

MEDICATIONS

- Antibiotics for infection will be prescribed.
- Bronchodilators to assist breathing may be prescribed.
- Pain relievers may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

Resume your normal activities as soon as symptoms improve.

DIET

No special diet. Drink plenty of water or other fluids daily to thin lung secretions.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of atelectasis.
- Symptoms return after treatment. Atelectasis can recur.