



BRONCHITIS, ACUTE

BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Inflammation (swelling) of the mucous lining of the bronchi (main air passages) to the lungs. Symptoms of acute bronchitis may start suddenly and last just a few days. It is a common disorder affecting all age groups. Chronic bronchitis persists over a long period of time.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- A common cold or sore throat may occur prior to bronchitis.
- Cough that produces little or no mucus at first. Later, mucus may be produced.
- Low fever (usually less than 101°F/38.3°C).
- Burning feeling in chest. Feeling of pressure behind the breastbone.
- Wheezing. There may also be trouble breathing.
- Feeling tired.

CAUSES

- Viral infection, usually. Most cases begin with a cold virus in the nose and throat. The virus then spreads to the lungs. A bacterial infection may also cause bronchitis. Infection causes the mucous membranes to become inflamed and produce thick, sticky mucus. This narrows the airways and causes the symptoms.
- Irritative bronchitis is caused by allergies, chemicals, and other irritants in the environment.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Chronic lung disease or chronic sinusitis.
- Smoking or second-hand smoke.
- Poor nutrition.
- Allergies.
- Areas with polluted air.
- Elderly and very young age groups.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid close contact with people who have a cold or the flu. Wash hands often to avoid germs.
- Don't smoke.
- If you work close to chemicals, dust, or other lung irritants, wear a special facemask.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable in 1 week. Cases with complications are usually curable in 2 weeks, with drug therapy. In some people, the cough may continue for several weeks, even after the infection is gone.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Pneumonia.
- Chronic bronchitis.
- Bronchiectasis (bronchial tubes become blocked).
- Pleurisy (swelling of the lining of the lungs).



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and use a stethoscope to listen to your lungs. Medical tests are usually not needed. A chest X-ray may be done if symptoms are more severe.
- Treatment is directed toward relieving the symptoms. Get extra rest and increase fluid intake.
- If you are a smoker, don't smoke during your illness. Smoking makes it harder to recover. Nonsmokers should avoid second-hand smoke.
- Increase air moisture. Take warm showers. Use a cool-mist humidifier if recommended by your health care provider. Clean the humidifier daily.
- To learn more: American Lung Association, 61 Broadway, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10006, (800) 586-4872; website: www.lungusa.org.

MEDICATIONS

- Use acetaminophen for fever and minor pain.
- Nonprescription cough suppressants (to ease coughing) or expectorants (to thin mucus) may be used to relieve symptoms. The mucus should be coughed up, so use cough suppressants with caution.
- Antibiotics may be prescribed for bacterial infection. They will not help a viral infection.
- Drugs may be prescribed for specific symptoms.

ACTIVITY

Get extra rest until symptoms improve. Then return to normal activities, as you feel better.

DIET

No special diet. Drink at least 8 to 10 glasses of fluid each day. This helps makes mucus easier to cough up.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of acute bronchitis.
- You develop a high fever and chills.
- You have chest pain.
- You cough up mucus that is thick, colored, or has blood in it.
- You feel short of breath, even when resting.

