



What is Bronchitis?

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is Bronchitis

Bronchitis is an inflammation of the airways that lead to the lungs. These airways are called bronchial tubes or bronchi. When the bronchi are inflamed, it is much more difficult for air to pass in and out of the lungs. This inflammation also creates more mucus that plugs up the bronchi making it even more difficult to breathe.

Bronchitis can be acute or chronic. Acute bronchitis can cause severe symptoms, but it lasts only a short period of time. Chronic bronchitis can be mild to severe and can last for years.

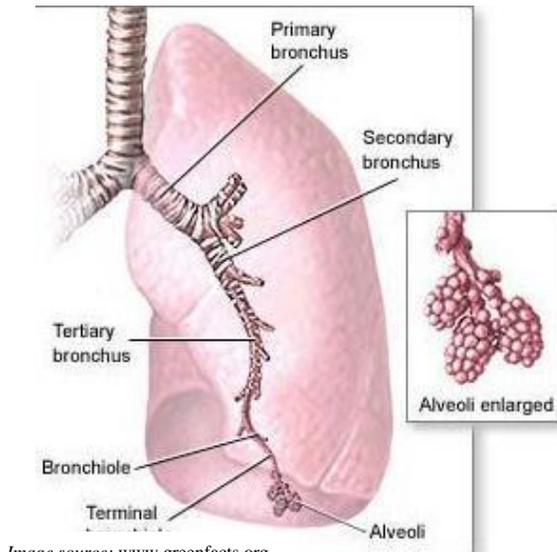


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What are the symptoms of bronchitis?

- Cough that may also produce thick white, yellow, or green mucus
- Wheezing or whistling sound with breathing
- Bad odor to mucus
- Weakness
- Fever and chills
- Headache
- Shortness of breath
- A general feeling of illness
- Chest tightness

What causes acute bronchitis?

Acute bronchitis is usually caused by an infection from a virus. Certain bacteria can also cause acute bronchitis. The infection causes the bronchi to swell and become clogged with thick mucus. Many people will have acute bronchitis at some point in their lives.

The viruses that cause bronchitis are sprayed in the air by others who are coughing or talking. You get these viruses by breathing in the air. You can also come in contact with these viruses by touching a hand or an object coated with the viruses and then by touching your mouth, nose, or eyes. It is important to notify your doctor if you have symptoms of bronchitis.

How is acute bronchitis treated?

Acute viral bronchitis usually goes away on its own after a week. Antibiotics will not help because these medicines only kill bacteria. Bacterial bronchitis may require antibiotic treatment. It is important to get plenty of rest, to drink lots of fluid (unless you are on a fluid restriction), and to treat the symptoms such as fever and headache with Tylenol as recommended by your doctor. You should also refrain from smoking.



Your doctor may order an inhaler medication similar to those used for asthma while you are ill to help you to breathe easier.

You should call your doctor if:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You cough or wheeze for more than 2 weeks• You feel worse over time and develop a high fever that does not go down | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You cough up blood• Your feet begin to swell• You have trouble breathing when you lie down. |
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Acute bronchitis may be prevented through good hand-washing, avoiding from touching your face, and by quitting smoking.

What causes chronic bronchitis?

- Repeated episodes of acute bronchitis.
- Smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke which irritates the airways and causes more mucus to be produced.
- Exposure over long periods of time to fumes, aerosol sprays, dust, pollen, and other irritants in the environment.

How will the doctor know if I have chronic bronchitis?

Your doctor will take a complete health history and conduct a physical exam. You may have a pulmonary function test ordered to test how well your lungs are working. During this test you will breathe into a machine to measure the amount of air in your lungs. Your doctor may also order a chest x-ray and blood work.

How is chronic bronchitis treated?

If you are a smoker, you will be asked to stop smoking. This is a very important step to prevent further damage to your bronchials and lungs. You may also need to avoid other irritants such as fumes and chemicals, or wear a mask when working with these products if you cannot avoid them.

Medications may also be prescribed by your doctor to reduce the inflammation in your airways and to make breathing easier. These medications are usually in inhaler form. If your symptoms do not get better, your doctor may also order steroids to decrease the inflammation.

Vaccination

Bronchitis increases your risk of lung infections. Speak with your doctor about the importance of annual flu vaccines and the pneumonia vaccine.



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