



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Acute bronchitis is an inflammation 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 is a different disorder that persists over a long period of time.

FREQUENT SIGNS & 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 secondhand smoke.
- Poor nutrition.
- Allergies.
- Areas with polluted air.
- Elderly and very young age groups.
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

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 around 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 secondhand 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.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page ☐