

# Bronchitis

## What is bronchitis?

Bronchitis is an inflammation and irritation of the bronchial tubes in the lungs.

## What causes bronchitis?

Bronchitis is usually caused by a virus. It often develops as part of a cold or an upper respiratory infection.

Several other things can cause bronchitis, including:

- Viruses or bacteria
- Tobacco smoke
- Air pollution

## What are symptoms of bronchitis?

The inflamed bronchial tubes secrete a sticky mucus called sputum. Coughing up mucus is one way the body works to get rid of it. The cough will last about 10–14 days.

Symptoms of bronchitis include:

- Coughing up mucus
- Having an uncomfortable or tight chest
- Feeling tired
- Running a low fever
- Wheezing when you breathe

People who smoke or work in polluted air are at risk for developing chronic bronchitis. Most people with chronic bronchitis have a history of heavy smoking.

## How can I treat bronchitis at home?

Focus on getting rid of the mucus in your bronchial tubes. Here is what you can do to speed the healing:

- Drink 8 to 12 glasses of liquids a day. Drink less if you have congestive heart failure. Liquids help thin the mucus in the lungs so your cough can clear it out.
- If you smoke, stop. Stay away from other people's smoke. Smoke irritates the lungs and slows healing.
- Breathe moist air from a humidifier, hot shower, or a sink filled with hot water. The heat and moisture will soften mucus and help the cough bring it up.
- Get extra rest.
- Have someone massage your chest and back muscles. The massage increases blood flow to the chest and helps you relax.
- Take aspirin, ibuprofen, or acetaminophen to relieve fever and body aches. Do not give aspirin to people younger than 20.

- If a dry cough keeps you awake, take cough syrup that has dextromethorphan in it. Avoid cough medicines that have more than one active ingredient.

If you have questions about cough medicines, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

### **Can antibiotics help?**

Antibiotics are strong medicines that treat bacterial infections. They do not treat viral infections. The main cause of bronchitis is usually a viral infection. For this reason, antibiotics don't ease the symptoms or shorten the illness for most people with bronchitis.

It is important to know that taking antibiotics when you don't need them can lead to you or your family getting a bacterial infection that is resistant to antibiotics.

### **How can I prevent bronchitis?**

- Give proper home care (see section on treating bronchitis at home) for minor respiratory problems, such as colds and flu.
- If you smoke, stop. People who smoke or live with smokers suffer more from bronchitis. Call the Quit For Life® Program at 1-800-462- 5327 for more information.
- Avoid polluted air.
- Get a flu shot every year if you are over 50 or your doctor has advised you to get one.

### **When should I call my doctor?**

Call your doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Fever of 104°F or higher that does not go down after 2 hours of home treatment.
- Fever over 100.5°F with shaking chills and cough that brings up mucus.
- Persistent fever. Call your doctor if the fever stays high:
  - 102°F or higher for 2 full days
  - 101°F or higher for 3 full days
  - 100°F or higher for 4 full days
- Labored, shallow, rapid breathing with shortness of breath. Any shaking chills.
- Sputum coughed up from the lungs is yellow, green, rust-colored, or bloody, and other symptoms (such as fever, cough with mucus, and severe fatigue) are getting worse.
- Cough that lasts more than 7 to 10 days after other symptoms have cleared, especially if it brings up sputum. (A dry, hacking cough may last several weeks after a viral illness such as a cold.)

### **Call your doctor right away if the sick person:**

- Is an infant.
- Is an older adult.
- Has a chronic illness, especially lung problems.

After clinic hours, call the Consulting Nurse Service toll-free 1-800-297-6877.