

# Acute Bronchitis

## What is acute bronchitis?

Bronchitis is swelling and irritation in the air passages that connect the windpipe with the lungs. With acute bronchitis you usually have a cough that produces phlegm, and pain behind the breastbone when you breathe deeply or cough.

## How does it occur?

Bronchitis often occurs with viral infections of the respiratory tract, such as colds and flu. Bacterial infections may also cause acute bronchitis. It may occur with childhood illnesses such as measles and whooping cough. Attacks are most frequent during the winter and when air pollution is high. Infants, young children, the elderly, smokers, and people with lung and heart diseases are most likely to get acute bronchitis.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- a deep cough that produces yellowish or greenish phlegm
- pain behind the breastbone when you breathe deeply or cough
- wheezing
- feeling short of breath
- fever
- chills
- sore muscles
- headache

## How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will examine you and ask about your symptoms. You may have tests, such as:

- a test of phlegm to look for bacteria
- chest x-ray
- blood tests.

## How is it treated?

Acute bronchitis often does not require medical treatment. Resting at home and drinking plenty of fluids to keep the mucus loose may be all you need to do to get better in a few days. If your symptoms are severe or you have other health problems (such as heart or lung disease or diabetes), you may need to take antibiotics.

## How long will the effects last?

Most of the time acute bronchitis clears up in a few days. Your cough may slowly

get better in 1 to 2 weeks.

It may take you longer to recover if:

- You are a smoker
- You live in an area where air pollution is a problem
- You have a heart or lung disease
- You have any other continuing health problems

### **How can I take care of myself?**

You can help yourself by:

- following the full treatment your health care provider recommends
- using a vaporizer, humidifier, or steam from hot water to add moisture to the air  
drinking plenty of liquids
- taking cough medicine if recommended by your health care provider
- resting in bed
- taking aspirin or acetaminophen to reduce fever and relieve headache and muscle pain (no one under age 21 should take aspirin because of the risk of Reye's syndrome)
- eating healthy meals.

### **Call your health care provider if:**

- You have trouble breathing
- You have a fever over 101 F (38.3 C)
- You cough up blood
- You don't feel better in 3 days
- You have any symptoms that concern you

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

To reduce your risk of getting a respiratory infection:

- Do not smoke
- Wash your hands often
- Get regular exercise
- Eat healthy foods