

BRONCHITIS AND PNEUMONIA

The arrival of winter heralds the season of colds, flu and many other respiratory illnesses. To help you better understand where problems may occur, here is a brief review of how the respiratory system works. Every time you breathe, air enters through your nose or mouth, continues down your windpipe (trachea) and into the lungs. The air travels through bronchial tubes (bronchi) in the lungs until it reaches tiny air sacs (alveoli) at the end of the passageways. In the air sacs, there is an exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide. Oxygen is passed into the bloodstream, and carbon dioxide is passed back from the bloodstream into the air sacs to be exhaled out of the body. Without a constant supply of oxygen, the cells in the body cannot function. Two common types of respiratory infections are BRONCHITIS and PNEUMONIA.

Bronchitis

Bronchitis is an infection of the bronchial tubes in the lungs.

The airways narrow, the air flow is reduced, and heavy mucus or phlegm is produced. This infection may be caused by a virus or bacterium. There are two types of bronchitis: **Acute bronchitis** – usually occurs after a severe cold, when the body's immunity is weakened. The condition often clears up in two weeks or less. **Chronic bronchitis** is commonly associated with cigarette smoking. Repeated bouts of acute bronchitis can also lead to development of chronic bronchitis. If left untreated, serious respiratory problems, lung damage or heart failure may develop.

Pneumonia

Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs. The air sacs (alveoli) fill up with pus or fluid and prevent oxygen from reaching the blood. Pneumonia can be caused by a virus or bacterium, by inhaling food or liquid into the lungs or by prolonged time in bed because of surgery or illness. Pneumonia is a common complication of the flu. If left untreated, some forms of pneumonia can be fatal.

	Chronic Bronchitis	Pneumonia
Who is at risk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smokers • Asthmatics • Elderly • People working/living in polluted or dusty environments • People with recurrent acute bronchitis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elderly and young children • Smokers/alcoholics • People with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - colds or respiratory infections - chronic health problems such as diabetes heart/lung/kidney disease - a weakened immune system such as cancer patients, malnourished individuals
Symptoms:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged coughing with heavy mucous production • Shortness of breath • Fatigue • Chest discomfort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High fever • Chills • Rapid breathing • Coughing with discolored mucus • Chest pain • Blueness around lips and nails (in severe cases) • Confusion (in severe cases or in elderly)
Common Treatment:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop smoking • Get adequate rest • Increase fluid intake to keep lung secretions thin • Take cough expectorants to help loosen secretions • Breathe moist air from a humidifier to loosen mucus • Take prescription antibiotics if it is a bacterial infection. • Complete the entire course of antibiotics, if prescribed by your doctor • Take prescription bronchodilators to ease breathing, as prescribed by a doctor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop smoking • Bed rest • Increase fluid intake to thin mucus • Take cough expectorants to clear mucus • Practice breathing exercise and coughing to clear lungs • Oxygen therapy to relieve breathlessness • Take fever reducing medications • Take prescription antibiotics if it is a bacterial infection. Complete your prescription.
Prevention:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop smoking and avoid second-hand smoke • Avoid exposure to polluted air and dust • Stay away from people with colds or flu • Eat a well-balanced diet to stay healthy • Get adequate exercise and rest • Ask your doctor about flu and pneumonia vaccinations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop smoking, avoid second-hand smoke, and other irritants • Stay away from people with colds, flu, or other respiratory illnesses • Eat a nutritious diet, get regular exercise and adequate rest to help resist infection • Yearly flu vaccination, especially if you belong to a high risk group • A one-time pneumococcal vaccination if you are over 65 or have chronic health problems. (This vaccination protects against the most prevalent type of bacterial pneumonia.)

Always seek prompt medical treatment for all respiratory infections to avoid complications from delayed or improper treatment.