

BRONCHITIS (Acute)

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

8.3

DESCRIPTION

Inflammation of the air passages (trachea; bronchi; bronchioles) of the lungs. Acute bronchitis is of sudden onset and short duration (chronic bronchitis is persistent over a long period and recurring over several years).

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Cough that produces little or no sputum initially, but does later on
- Low fever (usually less than 101°F or 38.3°C)
- Burning chest discomfort or feeling of pressure behind the breastbone
- Wheezing or uncomfortable breathing (sometimes)
- Feeling tired

CAUSES

Infection from one of many respiratory viruses. Most cases of acute bronchitis begin with a cold virus in the nose and throat that spreads to the airways. A secondary bacterial infection is common. Lung inflammation from breathing air that contains irritants, such as chemical fumes (ammonia), acid fumes, dust or smoke.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Smoking or second-hand smoke
- Allergies
- Poor nutrition
- Recent illness that has lowered resistance
- Areas with high atmospheric pollution
- Elderly and very young age groups

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid close contact with persons who have a cold or the flu.
- Don't smoke.
- If you work with chemicals, dust or other lung irritants, wear an appropriate face mask.
- Avoid second-hand smoke.
- Wash hands often to avoid germs.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Usually curable in one week. Cases with complications are usually curable in two weeks with drug therapy. In some people, the cough may continue for several weeks, even after the infections is gone.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Bacterial lung infection (various kinds of pneumonia)
- Chronic bronchitis from recurrent episodes of acute bronchitis; cough may persist for several weeks after initial improvement;
- Pleurisy (inflammation of the lining of the lungs).

GENERAL MEASURES

Diagnosis is usually based on the symptoms displayed, but a sputum culture may be done to check for bacterial infection. Treatment is directed toward relieving the symptoms. If you are a smoker, don't smoke during your illness. Now would be a good time to quit. Smoking delays recovery and makes complications more likely. Increase air moisture. Take frequent hot showers; use a cool-mist, humidifier by your bed. Clean humidifier daily. If a humidifier is not available place a basin of water in the room.

MEDICATION

- 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 & DIET

Resume normal activity gradually as symptoms improve. No special diet. Drink at least 8 to 10 glasses of fluid each day to help thin mucus secretions so they can be coughed up more easily.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF..

- Thickened, discolored or blood-streaked sputum
- Shortness of breath, even when the body is at rest
- High fever and chills
- Chest pains

Student Health Center



WWW.SIU.EDU/~SHC

This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.