

DESCRIPTION

Inflammation (swelling) 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. Many people have a cold or sore throat prior to bronchitis. Chronic bronchitis persists over a long period of time.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- 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 bronchi. Less frequently, 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 allergens, chemicals, and other irritants in the environment.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable in 7-10 days, with adequate rest, fluid intake and medication therapy. It is not uncommon for the cough to continue for several weeks, even after the infection is gone. Possible complications may include pneumonia; chronic bronchitis; bronchiectasis and pleurisy.

TREATMENT MEASURES

- Get extra rest and increase fluid intake.
- If you are a smoker, don't smoke during your illness. Smoking makes it much harder to recover. Non-smokers should avoid second-hand smoke.
- Increase air moisture by using a humidifier or taking warm showers.

MEDICATIONS

- Antibiotics may be prescribed for bacterial infection but will not be effective for a viral infection.
 - Oral steroids may also be prescribed to reduce inflammation.
 - You should begin your steroid prescription today.
 - You should begin your steroid prescription tomorrow.
 - In some cases your doctor may prescribe an inhaler or nebulizer treatments.
- Unless your doctor tells you differently, always finish the full course of your antibiotic and/or steroid prescription, even if you start to feel better.
- Antibiotics and steroids may interfere with the effectiveness of birth control pills. Use an alternative method of contraception for the remainder of the month after finishing your antibiotic and/or steroid prescription.

Your doctor also recommends the following over-the-counter medications. These medications may offer significant symptom relief:

- For fever or pain use acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
(Acetaminophen and ibuprofen may also be alternated every 3 hours for persistent fever or pain.)
- Antihistamine
- Decongestant (Such as Phenylephrine or Pseudoephedrine)
- Mucolytic (Such as Guaifenesin)
- Cough Suppressant (Such as Dextromethorphan)
- Throat Lozenges
- Saline Nasal Spray or Drops
- Decongestant Nasal Spray (Limit use to 3 days)

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF

- You develop a high fever and chills.
- You have chest pain.
- You cough up thick, colored, or blood tinged mucus.
- You feel short of breath, even when resting.