

DESCRIPTION

Inflammation and irritation of the pleura. The pleura is a thin, two-layered membrane that lines the lung and chest cavity. Pleurisy is not a disease, but may be a symptom of many different disorders. Fluid (pleural effusion) may develop at the site of inflammation, between the two membrane layers. This is called wet pleurisy. If there is no fluid build-up, it is dry pleurisy.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Sudden chest pain that worsens with breathing and coughing. The pain varies from vague discomfort that occurs only with deep breathing or coughing to intense, stabbing pain. Pain is usually over the area of pleural inflammation, but it may also occur in the lower chest or abdomen.
- Fever (sometimes).
- Discomfort on moving the affected side.
- Rapid, shallow breathing.
- Breathing difficulty if pleural effusion develops.

CAUSES

Pleurisy can be caused by infection (e.g., bacterial, fungal, or viral), injury, irritation, blood clot, or disease. Sometimes, no cause is found.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Lung or chest infection (e.g., pneumonia, bronchitis, tuberculosis).
- Injury to the chest/rib fracture.
- Collapse of a part of the lung.
- Kidney, liver, or pancreatic disorders.
- Weak immune system, due to illness or drugs.
- Blood clot in the lung.
- Cancer in other parts of the body.
- Collagen vascular disease, such as systemic lupus erythematosus or rheumatoid arthritis.
- Smoking.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Outcome depends on successful treatment of the disorder causing it. Sometimes, pleurisy symptoms clear completely on their own in 1 to 2 weeks.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Fluid build-up (pleural effusion).
- Scar tissue (adhesions) may form that cause pain and shortness of breath.
- Pneumonia.

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask about your symptoms and activities. Medical tests may include labs, X-rays of the chest, examination of pleural fluid, and others to diagnose the cause.
- The main treatment is aimed at the underlying cause. Other treatment may help the symptoms of pleurisy.
- For chest pain, wrap the entire chest with two or three non-adhesive, 6-inch-wide elastic bandages.
- Lie with the sore side down, on a firm surface. This will help ease the pain.
- Quit smoking. Find a way to stop that works for you.
- Holding a pillow firmly against the chest wall helps ease the pain when coughing.
- Excess fluid in the pleura may need to be removed. This is done with a needle inserted into the pleura to draw out the fluid.

MEDICATIONS

Treatment for pleurisy will depend on the underlying cause:

- Antibiotics may be prescribed for infection.
- Bronchodilators to improve air flow.
- Narcotic pain medication for moderate to severe pain or cough.
- ↳ Unless your doctor tells you differently, always finish the full course of your antibiotic prescription, even if you start to feel better.
- ↳ Antibiotics 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 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.)
- Cough Suppressant (Such as Dextromethorphan)

ACTIVITY

Reduce activity until pain and cough get better. Then resume normal activities gradually.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF

- You develop a fever.
- You experience increased breathlessness.
- You develop blue or dark fingernails, toenails or lips.
- You experience increased pain.
- Your cough is dry and nonproductive.
- You have blood in the sputum.