

Bronchitis

Bronchitis just means irritation of the airways (bronchi). This could be caused by an allergy or an infection, and the infection could be any of a whole variety of microbes. Most episodes of bronchitis are rather mild and resolve on their own.

The most frequent origin of bronchitis is a common cold caused by a virus. Beginning in the upper airway (nose & throat), it finds its way to the lungs after a few days. Then a cough develops which changes daily (tight to loose). In hearty individuals the cough goes away within another 4-5 days. If the mucus doesn't get out of the lungs the lungs may get infected with bacteria.

Antibiotics can treat bacteria. Left untreated this can progress to pneumonia.

Smokers don't have very active removal of secretions or very good functioning of the protective white blood cells to the lung, so they typically need antibiotics sooner than others. Asthmatics can have mucus-laden bronchi that trap secretions. Hence they are more likely to need antibiotics. Their asthma regimen may need some improvement too. Other individuals with weak immune systems may have a more

urgent need for antibiotic treatment. If you receive antibiotics and you do not improve much, it is fairly good proof that you only had a virus, hence don't need the (antibacterial) antibiotics.

There are things you can do to get better! Remember the secretions need to move out of the lung. To accomplish that you may need to steam the secretions so they come up. This is especially true if your cough is constantly annoying but doesn't bring anything up. Put your face over a sink full of steamy hot water for 5 minutes, breathing in the steam with a towel over your head (like a facial). Then, when you feel some secretions being loosened up, take a very deep breath and make a cough that starts way down low to bring those secretions out. Secretions can be spat out or swallowed: the stomach acid kills any bacteria you swallow.

When the cough is bringing up nothing (even after the above steam treatment) you may need to suppress the cough. First try an ancient acupressure point just below your nose and above the upper lip: press hard there when the urge to cough comes and



suppress it. If that doesn't work cough medicines may come to the rescue.

Over-the-counter cough medicines like Robitussin DM or Vicks Cough and Cold work quite well. If they don't work for you, sometimes you can go up on the dose a little beyond what is recommended. If that still doesn't work, we can give you a prescription medicine. Most of the medicines have some alcohol in them, and a not-so-ancient cough medicine is simply hot whiskey (make sure you are of age!).

Get adequate rest while you are sick and eat well. Reduce your workload and take a nap. Call us if you notice: rapid heart rate, rapid breathing, lethargy, wheezing, air hunger, high fever, loss of weight or reduced urine production. Best of all, think about getting the flu shot next year as it seems to protect the lung from some episodes of bronchitis. And if you are over 60 please ask about getting a pneumococcal vaccine.

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