



# Bronchitis

PATIENT EDUCATION SERIES

## What is bronchitis?

Bronchitis is an inflammation of the bronchi (the air passages that extend from the windpipe into the lungs) which may be caused by viruses, mycoplasma, bacteria, smoking or inhalation of chemical pollutants or dust. The cells that line the bronchi have tiny hairs (cilia) that trap and eliminate pollutants. When these cells become overly irritated, they stop functioning. Consequently, the air passages become clogged by debris, and irritation increases. In response, a heavy secretion of mucous develops, which causes the characteristic cough of bronchitis.

Brief bouts of acute bronchitis may evolve from a severe cold or flu, but may also begin without having had an infection. If you have underlying asthma, bronchitis may precipitate an asthma attack. Even if you have no history of asthma, bronchitis may trigger some asthma-like symptoms, such as wheezing and shortness of breath. Smoking is frequently associated with chronic bronchitis.

## What are the symptoms of bronchitis?

Symptoms may include:

- a deep cough that produces yellowish or greenish phlegm
- pain behind the breastbone when you breathe deeply or cough
- wheezing
- breathlessness
- low-grade fever or chills
- headache
- sore muscles
- fatigue

## What is the treatment for bronchitis?

- Stop smoking!
- Drink large amounts of fluids to help loosen up chest mucous and move it out of your body.
- If your room is dry, using a humidifier may help.
- Try to get enough rest and sleep. Your body needs to rest to help fight the infection.

- There is debate among experts about the usefulness of cough suppressants and expectorants for cough that comes along with a cold. Generally, a wet productive cough that produces mucus is good as it clears secretions. If your cough disturbs your sleep, try a hot drink, elevating your head a little on pillow and humidifying your room.
- An OTC cough medicine with dexamethoraphan (DM) (e.g. Robitussin DM or generic equivalent, per package directions) may help some people who have bothersome, dry, spasmodic cough.
- Guaifenesin (per package directions), an expectorant, is available either by itself or as a common ingredient in cough/cold OTC remedies, some people find this product helps to thin and mobilize mucus. See your provider if your cough is worsening, keeping you up without relief, or associated with wheezing or shortness of breath. Other prescription medicine may be indicated.
- If antibiotics are prescribed by your medical provider, be sure to take *all* of the medication even if you feel better before you finish the medication. You may feel better before the infection is really gone, and stopping the medication will only leave the infection in your body.
- If a bronchodilating inhaler or pills are prescribed by your medical provider to open the air passages, be sure to follow the instructions you are given.
- It is important to return to Health Services or to call your provider if your symptoms become worse, if you develop a high fever (101°F or higher), or if you do not begin to improve within a few days. Symptoms usually last about 10 days.
- Contact your provider if at any point you feel you are too ill to care for yourself.