What is bronchitis?
Bronchitis is an inflammation of the bronchi (the air passages that extend from the windpipe into the lungs) which is generally caused by viruses, and less commonly other pathogens. 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
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What is the treatment for bronchitis?
- Drink large amounts of fluids to loosen up chest mucus and move it out of your body.
- If your room is dry, try using a humidifier.
- 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 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 dextromethorphan (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. 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 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.
- Return to Health Services or contact your provider if your symptoms become worse, if you develop a high fever (101°F or higher), if you are too ill to care for yourself or if you do not begin to improve within a few days. Symptoms usually last about 10 days.