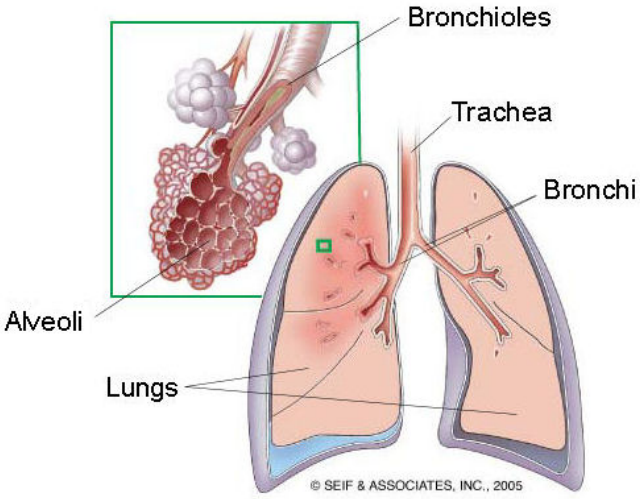
Streptococcal (Pneumococcal) Pneumonia

Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs, and is typically caused by tiny (microscopic) living organisms such as bacteria and viruses. Streptococcus pneumoniae (also referred to as the pneumococcus, Streptococcal pneumonia, and Pneumococcal pneumonia.) is the most common bacteria that causes pneumonia in adults and children. This infection is not contagious (it is not spread from person to person). The organism is typically found in the nose and throat of healthy adults and children, but does not cause infection at these sites. Pneumonia occurs when the pneumococcus is breathed into the deeper part of the lungs (*respiratory tract*).



In some people, particularly the very young or elderly and those who are debilitated, pneumococcal pneumonia may follow influenza or even a common cold. Some people may also get pneumonia while staying in a hospital for other conditions.

SYMPTOMS

The most common symptoms are cough, fever, chest pain, an increased rate of breathing, wheezing, and sputum production.

DIAGNOSIS

- Pneumonia is diagnosed by your caregiver using a combination of:
  - Analyzing your symptoms.
  - Listening to your lungs with a stethoscope.
  - Chest x-ray.
- Diagnosing pneumococcal pneumonia requires growing the bacteria from a culture of your sputum or blood.

TREATMENT

Pneumococcal pneumonia generally responds well to antibiotic medications. Patients can be treated in hospital or at home, depending on their overall condition.

Vaccination

A pneumococcal shot (*vaccine*) is available to prevent this common cause of bacterial pneumonia and its potential complications. Among adults, it is suggested or recommended for people 65 years old and older and for groups of individuals at high risk of acquiring this infection. These include individuals:

- With lung or breathing problems (such as smokers, or people with asthma, emphysema and chronic bronchitis).
- On chemotherapy.
- With problems of their immune system.

You may be offered or have been given a pneumococcal vaccination as part of your treatment or hospitalization.

If you are being treated in a hospital:

- Your health care provider may prescribe medicine you can take by mouth or by intravenous (IV) means. This means your medicine is given into a vein.
- You may be given oxygen and IV fluids.
- Your heart rate and breathing may be monitored.

- X-rays are frequently taken to keep an eye on your pneumonia.
- You will have pneumococcal screening or vaccination if you are over 65 years old and are not immunized.
- Your caregiver may do tests (such as blood gasses or pulse oximetry) to see how well your lungs are working.
- If you are a smoker, it is time to quit. You will receive instructions on how to best stop smoking. Your caregivers can provide medicine and counseling to help you quit.
- Usually you will begin to feel better after 2 to 3 days of antibiotics. If you are an otherwise healthy person, you should feel close to normal after a week or so. If you are over 60 years old or have other medical problems, it may take longer to feel normal.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Get plenty of rest but also get up as much as possible. Follow your caregivers' instructions for returning to activities.
- Drink more liquids (water, tea, or fruit juice) every day to help you cough up mucus more easily.
- Cough suppressants may be used if you are losing too much rest. However, a cough protects us by clearing our lungs. This is one reason for not overusing cough suppressants.
- Your cough may be worse at night. Sleeping in a semi-upright position in a recliner, or using a couple pillows under your head will help with this.
- Take all your prescribed medication until finished.
- Your caregiver may also prescribe an expectorant to loosen the mucus. Cough up secretions as much as possible.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Smoking is a common cause of bronchitis and can contribute to pneumonia. Stopping this habit is an important self help step.
- A cold steam vaporizer or humidifier in your room or home may help loosen mucus.
- Rest as you need it. Your body will usually let you know when to rest.
- If you are a smoker and continue to smoke, your cough may last several weeks after your pneumonia has cleared.
- Use a heating pad on a low setting to reduce chest discomfort. **Do not sleep with a heating pad.**
- Call your caregiver if you feel you are getting worse or if you are not getting better in 2 to 3 days.

PREVENTION

- **Stop smoking.** Smoking decreases your ability to get well.
- Wear a mask when cleaning dusty or moldy areas and around people who may be infectious. Avoid visiting people when you know they are infectious even though this pneumonia is usually not catchy.
- Ask your caregiver what vaccines you should have. This is especially important if you:
  - Are in a care setting such as a nursing home.
  - Work around a lot of other people.
  - Have breathing problems.
  - Are immunocompromised with cancer chemotherapy or have HIV.
- Pneumococcal vaccine (Pneumovax, Prevnar) prevents pneumococcal infections and complications of this infection.
- Flu vaccine prevents pneumonia and other infections caused by influenza viruses. It must be taken yearly to protect against new viral strains. Take it every fall when it is available at your caregivers practice site.
- Hib vaccine prevents pneumonia in children from Haemophilus influenzae type b. Having children vaccinated helps keep them from bringing home infections to their older loved ones.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop more pus like (*purulent*) sputum, have an uncontrolled temperature, or your illness becomes worse. This is especially important if you are elderly or weakened from any other disease.

- You can not control your cough with suppressants and are losing sleep.
- You begin coughing up blood.
- You develop pain that is getting worse or is uncontrolled with medications, or you have chest pain that worsens with coughing or breathing.
- You develop a new oral temperature above 101° F (38.3 ° C), after not having a temperature for one or more days.
- Any of the symptoms which initially brought you in for treatment are getting worse rather than better, or you develop shortness of breath or chest pain.

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