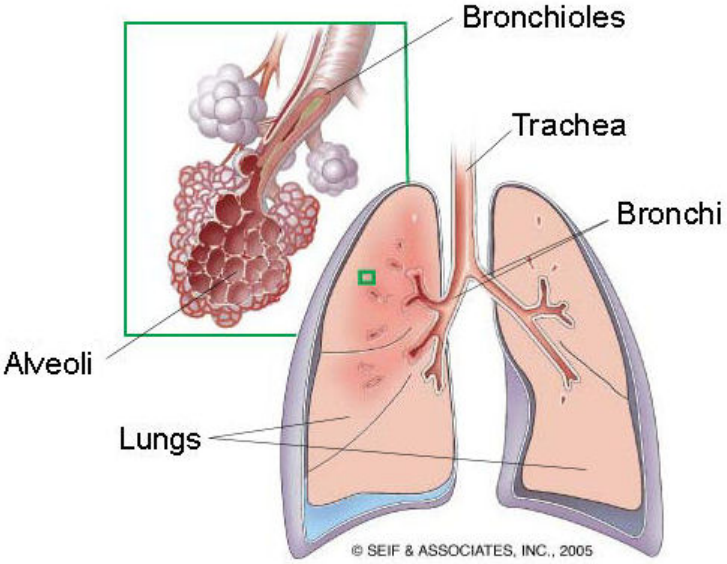
Bronchitis

Bronchitis is the body's way of reacting to injury and/or infection (*inflammation*) of the bronchi. Bronchi are the air tubes that extend from the windpipe into the lungs. If the inflammation becomes severe, it may cause shortness of breath.



CAUSES

Inflammation may be caused by:

- A virus.
- Germs (*bacteria*).
- Dust.
- Allergens.
- Pollutants and many other irritants.

The cells lining the bronchial tree are covered with tiny hairs (*cilia*). These constantly beat upward, away from the lungs, toward the mouth. This keeps the lungs free of pollutants. When these cells become too irritated and are unable to do their job, mucus begins to develop. This causes the characteristic cough of bronchitis. The cough clears the lungs when the cilia are unable to do their job. Without either of these protective mechanisms, the mucus would settle in the lungs. Then you would develop pneumonia.

Smoking is a common cause of bronchitis and can contribute to pneumonia. Stopping this habit is the single most important thing you can do to help yourself.

TREATMENT

- Your caregiver may prescribe an antibiotic if the cough is caused by bacteria. Also, medicines that open up your airways make it easier to breathe. Your caregiver may also recommend or prescribe an expectorant. It will loosen the mucus to be coughed up. Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Removing whatever causes the problem (smoking, for example) is critical to preventing the problem from getting worse.
- Cough suppressants may be prescribed for relief of cough symptoms.
- Inhaled medicines may be prescribed to help with symptoms now and to help prevent problems from returning.
- For those with recurrent (*chronic*) bronchitis, there may be a need for steroid medicines.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- During treatment, you develop more pus-like mucus (*purulent sputum*).
- You or your child has an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.
- Your baby is older than 3 months with a rectal temperature of 102º F (38.9º C) or higher.
- **Your baby is 3 months old or younger with a rectal temperature of 100.4º F (38º C) or higher.**
- You become progressively more ill.
- You have increased difficulty breathing, wheezing, or shortness of breath.

It is necessary to seek immediate medical care if you are elderly or sick from any other disease.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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