Pneumonia

Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs. It may be caused by a bacteria or virus. Most forms are bacterial. Usually, these infections are caused by breathing infectious particles into the lungs (*respiratory tract*).

SYMPTOMS

The most common problems (*symptoms*) are:

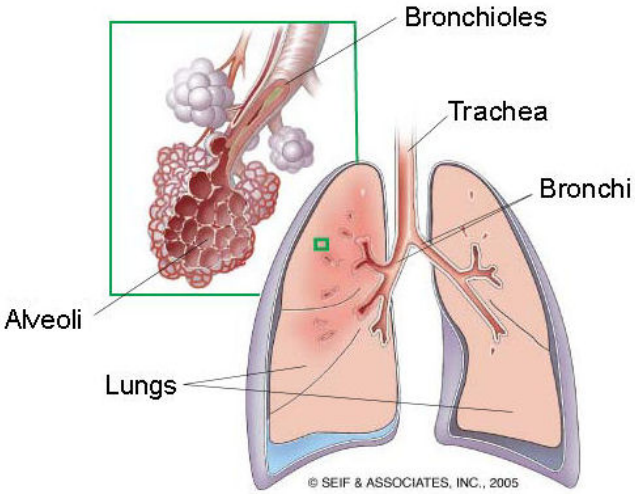
- Cough.
- Fever.
- Chest pain.
- Increased rate of breathing.
- Wheezing.
- Mucus production.

DIAGNOSIS

Often these infections are diagnosed on exam by your caregiver. Sometimes the diagnosis may require:

- Chest X-rays.
- Blood analysis.
- Cultures. Blood cultures may be done to help find the cause of your pneumonia.

Your caregiver may do tests (blood gasses or pulse oximetry) to see how well your lungs are working.



TREATMENT

The bacterial pneumonias generally respond well to medicines (*antibiotics*) that kill germs. Viral infections must run their course. These infections will not respond to antibiotics. A pneumococcal shot (*vaccine*) is available to prevent a common bacterial pneumonia. This is usually suggested for the elderly and for other groups of higher risk individuals, such as those on chemotherapy or those who have problems with their immune system.

- **You will have pneumococcal screening or vaccination if you are over 65 years old and are not immunized.**
- **If you are a smoker, it is time to quit.** You may receive instructions on how to best stop smoking. Your caregiver can provide medicines and counseling to help you quit.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Cough suppressants may be used if you are losing too much rest. However, coughing protects you by clearing your lungs. This is one reason for not using cough suppressants, if able, as they take away this protection.
- Your caregiver may have prescribed an antibiotic if she or he feels your cough is caused by a bacterial infection. Take all your medicine until you are finished.
- Your caregiver may also prescribe an expectorant to 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.
- Smoking is a common cause of bronchitis and can contribute to pneumonia. Stopping this habit is an important self-help step.
- If you are a smoker and continue to smoke, your cough may last several weeks after your pneumonia has cleared.
- A cold steam vaporizer or humidifier in your room or home may help loosen mucus.
- Coughing is often worse at night. Sleeping in a semi-upright position in a recliner or using a couple pillows under your head will help with this.
- Get rest as you feel it is needed. Your body will usually let you know when to rest.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop pus-like mucus (*sputum*) or your illness becomes worse. This is especially true if you are elderly or weakened from any other disease.
- You cannot control your cough with suppressants and are losing sleep.
- You begin coughing up blood.
- You develop pain which is getting worse or is uncontrolled with medicines.
- You or your child has an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.
- Any of the symptoms which initially brought you in for treatment are getting worse rather than better.
- You develop shortness of breath or chest pain.

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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