

Acute Bronchitis: Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment with Home Remedies

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Abstract: Bronchitis is acute (sudden onset and temporary) or chronic (ongoing inflammation of the bronchi). The bronchi are the large tubes that carry air from the trachea to the lungs. The inflammation triggers a cough that often produces mucus.

Key words: bronchitis, acute, chronic, inflammation, mucus, contagious, symptoms, chronic, lung, condition.

Many people wonder if bronchitis is contagious. Technically, the answer is no. However, while bronchitis itself is not contagious, some of the viral or bacterial infections that cause it can be. Acute and chronic bronchitis have the same symptoms, including: Chest pain, fatigue, fever (usually lower than 100.4 degrees F), shortness of breath, cough, wheezing. With acute bronchitis, symptoms usually resolve in two to three weeks. However, chronic bronchitis symptoms can last for months. Lung disease is usually the cause of chronic bronchitis. While acute bronchitis develops from respiratory illnesses, like a cold, the flu, or COVID-19, chronic bronchitis develops over time from chronic lung conditions. It is included in the umbrella term "chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)." Risk factors for developing chronic bronchitis include:.. You have a higher chance of getting either kind of bronchitis if: you smoke, if you have asthma and allergies, if you have a weaker immune system. This is sometimes the case for older adults and people with ongoing diseases, as well as for babies and young children. Even a cold can make it more likely, since your body's already busy fighting those germs. You have gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD (chronic acid reflux)

Your risk of getting chronic bronchitis is higher if:

1. You're a female smoker. You may be more at risk than a male smoker.
2. You have a family history of lung disease.

During the first few days of illness, bronchitis symptoms are similar to that of a common cold. Healthcare providers diagnose bronchitis by asking patients questions about symptoms and doing a physical examination. Though they rarely order additional tests, if you have a fever, your physician may order a chest X-ray to rule out pneumonia.

Chest X-rays. This test uses invisible radiation beams to make images of internal tissues, bones, and organs, including the lungs.

Arterial blood gas. This blood test is used to analyze the amount of carbon dioxide and oxygen in the blood.

Pulse oximetry. An oximeter is a small device that measures the amount of oxygen in the blood. To get this measurement, a small sensor is taped or clipped on a finger or toe. When the machine is on, a small red light can be seen in the sensor. The sensor is painless, and the red light does not get hot.

Cultures of nasal discharge and sputum. Tests may be done on the sputum you cough up or on nasal discharge swabbed from your nose. This testing helps find and identify the microorganism causing the infection.

Pulmonary function tests. These are tests that help to measure how well the lungs move air in and out. The tests are often done with special machines that you breathe into.

How is acute bronchitis treated?

Acute bronchitis is often mild and does not cause complications. The symptoms often resolve on their own and lung function goes back to normal. In most cases, antibiotics are not needed to treat acute bronchitis. That's because most of the infections are caused by viruses. Antibiotics are not effective against viruses. If it has progressed to pneumonia, then antibiotics may be needed. Treatment is aimed at treating the symptoms and may include: Staying away from secondhand smoke, taking cough medicine, humidifying the air, drinking more fluids, taking pain relievers and fever reducers, such as acetaminophen, quitting smoking, don't use antihistamines. They dry up the secretions and can make the cough worse.

Acute bronchitis can get worse and progress to chronic bronchitis or pneumonia. If this happens, a different treatment may be needed. Acute bronchitis can't always be prevented. But there are things you can do to lower your risk for acute bronchitis: Wash your hands often with soap and clean water for at least 20 seconds. Or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Stay away from others who are sick. If you smoke, quit. Ask your healthcare provider for help. They may be able to suggest medicines or other resources. Stay up-to-date on vaccines, as recommended by your healthcare provider: **Flu vaccine.** Getting a flu shot every year can help prevent both the flu and pneumonia.

Pneumococcal vaccine. The pneumococcal shot can protect you from a common form of bacterial pneumonia. Anyone can get pneumococcal disease. But those at the highest risk are children younger than age 2, adults ages 65 and older, people with certain health conditions, and smokers. There are different types of pneumococcal vaccines. Talk with your healthcare provider and your child's provider about the pneumococcal vaccine. The CDC recommends the vaccine for all children younger than 5 years old, all adults age 65 or older, and certain other people who are at high risk for complications.

Tips to help you get the most from a visit to your healthcare provider:

Know the reason for your visit and what you want to happen. Before your visit, write down questions you want answered. Bring someone with you to help you ask questions and remember what your healthcare provider tells you. At the visit, write down the name of a new diagnosis and any new medicines, treatments, or tests. Also write down any new instructions your healthcare provider gives you. Know why a new medicine or treatment is prescribed and how it will help you. Also know what the side effects are. Ask if your condition can be treated in other ways. Know why a test or procedure is recommended and what the results could mean. Know what to expect if you do not take the medicine or have the test or procedure. If you have a follow-up appointment, write down the date, time, and purpose for that visit. Know how you can contact your healthcare provider if you have questions. Some natural remedies may help soothe the symptoms of bronchitis.

Ginger

Some researchers have found evidence^{Trusted Source} that ginger can have an anti-inflammatory effect against respiratory infection.

You can take ginger in several ways:

- Chew dried, crystallized ginger.
- Use fresh ginger to make tea.
- Eat it raw or add it to food.
- Take it in capsule form as directed.

It's safest to use ginger in a natural form rather than in capsules or supplements. You may be sensitive to ginger, so take it in small amounts if you're not used to it. Eating occasional ginger is safe for everyone, but do not take ginger as a supplement or medication if you:

- are pregnant or breastfeeding
- have diabetes
- have heart problems
- have any type of blood disorder

2. Garlic

Garlic is believed to have a number of healing properties. Results of a 2016 study^{Trusted Source} show that garlic effectively inhibited the growth of infectious bronchitis virus. This finding suggests garlic can be used as a natural remedy for bronchitis. Fresh garlic is best, but if you dislike the taste, you can get it in capsule form, too. Use garlic with caution if you have a bleeding disorder. Always take it in small amounts to make sure it doesn't upset your stomach.

3. Turmeric

Turmeric is a spice that comes from the root of *Curcuma longa*. A 2018 study found that turmeric has a number of properties that could make it useful in fighting bronchitis. Among these are antiviral, antibacterial, and anti-inflammatory effects. Turmeric also increases antioxidant activity, meaning that it may help reduce irritation and boost your immunity. To take turmeric:

- Add fresh turmeric to salads or use it to make pickles.
- Mix 1/2 teaspoon of powdered turmeric with 1 teaspoon of honey to make a paste. Consume the paste 1 to 3 times per day while symptoms last.
- Take turmeric in capsule form as directed.
- Use powdered or fresh turmeric to make tea.
- Using turmeric as a spice in food is usually safe unless you are sensitive to it. Do not use turmeric as a medication if you have:
 - stomach issues
 - gallbladder issues
 - bleeding or blood disorders
 - hormone-sensitive conditions
 - iron deficiency
- If you're pregnant or nursing, don't take turmeric in large amounts.

4. Steam

A steam inhalation can help break up mucus so you can expel it more easily.

The easiest way to use steam is in the bath or shower. Make your shower as hot as you can handle, step in, then breathe deeply through your mouth and nose.

The hot water will also help relax muscles that may be tense from coughing. You can also visit a steam room at a gym or spa, if one's available and you have enough energy. It's best not to soak in a hot bath if you feel ill or short of breath.

Another steam option involves putting hot water in a bowl, covering your head with a towel, and inhaling the steam. Some people add a mentholated vapor rub to the hot water to help with moving mucus.

5. Saltwater

Gargling saltwater may help break up mucus and reduce pain in your throat.

Dissolve 1 teaspoon of salt into a glass of warm water. Sip small amounts of the salt water and gargle at the back of your throat. Do not swallow the water. Instead, spit it out in the sink. Repeat as often as you like.

Afterward, you may want to rinse your mouth with plain water.

6. Sleep

Getting plenty of sleep will allow your body to rest and recover.

It may be difficult to sleep soundly while fighting a cough, but you can take care to avoid any unnecessary activity.

It is during the deep stages of sleep that you repair and enhance immune function so your body can better fight the inflammation.

7. Lifestyle changes

A healthy lifestyle goes hand in hand with the prevention of illnesses. It can help you recover faster when you're sick, too. A minor illness may even be your body's way of telling you to slow down and take it easy.

8. Honey and lemons

A range of herbal treatments can help soothe dry coughs and sore throats.

Honey and lemon are popular remedies, either alone or in teas. Honey may help reduce the duration of a cough due to its antimicrobial properties. However, more research is needed.

9. Pineapple

Pineapple juice contains bromelain, which has anti-inflammatory properties. The bromelain in pineapple may help break up and expel mucus due to bronchitis and other respiratory infections.

10. Thyme

Thyme is a herb that appears to have anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antimicrobial, and antiseptic properties.

In 2021, 730 people joined a study to look at the effect of a preparation containing essences of thyme and ivy. Of these, 87% of participants experienced clinically significant improvements in their cough symptoms, and 90% saw significant improvements in their quality of life.

You can look for over-the-counter (OTC) syrups containing thyme or use it to make an infusion.

Medical treatment

Antibiotics can treat acute bronchitis that stems from a bacterial infection but not a virus.

Some medications can help manage the symptoms, but they won't speed up the healing process.

Medications

You can pair OTC medications with the suggested natural remedies. The following medications may be helpful:

- aspirin (do not take aspirin if you take other blood thinner medications)
- ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin)
- acetaminophen (Tylenol)
- expectorant cough syrup

There are two types of over-the-counter cough medications: those that are meant to keep you from coughing (cough suppressants) and those that thin mucus to help you cough out congestion (expectorants).

It is essential to choose the right type of medication for the type of cough you have, as using the wrong one might make symptoms worse.

Other therapies

Many of the therapies and treatments used for bronchitis are designed to help chronic, not acute, bronchitis.

Chronic bronchitis develops over time after long-term exposure to irritants that damage the lining of the bronchial tubes. When this damage occurs, your bronchial tubes become irritated and begin to produce too much mucus in an effort to coat the irritation.

While waiting for symptoms to improve:

- Drink plenty of water and warm liquids, and eat healthy foods.
- Rest as much as possible until you feel completely healthy.
- Incorporate as many aspects of a healthy lifestyle into your daily routine to maintain your health.

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