



# Acute Bronchitis

## What is acute bronchitis?

Acute bronchitis is an infection of the bronchial tree. The bronchial (say: "brawn-kee-ull") tree is made up of the tubes that carry air into your lungs. When these tubes get inflamed or infected, they swell and mucus production increases. This may make it harder for you to breathe. You may cough up mucus and you may wheeze (make a whistling sound when you breathe) due to the spasm of the bronchial tubes.

## What causes acute bronchitis?

Acute bronchitis is almost always caused by viruses. The viruses attack the lining of the bronchial tree and cause infection. As your body fights back against these viruses, more swelling occurs and more mucus is made. It takes time for your body to kill the viruses and heal the damage to your bronchial tubes. In most cases, the same viruses that cause colds cause acute bronchitis. Research has shown that bacterial infection is much less common in bronchitis than we used to think. Very rarely, an infection caused by a fungus can cause acute bronchitis.

## How do people get acute bronchitis?

The viruses that cause acute bronchitis are sprayed into the air or onto people's hands when they cough. You can get acute bronchitis if you breathe in these viruses or if you touch a hand that is coated with the viruses. If you smoke or are around damaging smoke fumes from a housemate, you are more likely to get acute bronchitis and to have it longer. This is because your bronchial tree is already inflamed and damaged as the toxic smoke fumes paralyze and kill the cilia that line the bronchial tree and are important in helping clear the excess mucous from the bronchial tubes.

## How is acute bronchitis treated?

Most cases of acute bronchitis will go away on their own after a variable time course of a few days or a few weeks. Acute bronchitis is usually caused by viruses, antibiotics (medicines that kill bacteria) will not help. Even if you cough up mucus that is colored or thick, antibiotics probably won't help you get better any faster. If you smoke, you should stop smoking altogether. This will help your bronchial tree heal faster.

For some people with acute bronchitis, doctors prescribe medicines that are usually used to treat asthma. These medicines can help open the bronchial tubes and prevent the spasm causing a great degree of the cough. As they help

with the spasm they can help you clear out mucus. They are usually given with an inhaler. An inhaler sprays the medicine right into the bronchial tree. Your doctor will decide if this treatment is right for you.

### **How long will the cough from acute bronchitis last?**

Sometimes the cough from acute bronchitis lasts for several weeks or months because of the inflammation of the bronchial tubes after an infection - this is called a **post infection cough**. Usually this happens because the bronchial tree is taking a long time to heal. However, a cough that doesn't go away, especially if you still do not feel well may be a sign of another problem, like asthma or pneumonia.

### **How can I keep from getting acute bronchitis again?**

If you smoke, the best defense against acute bronchitis is to quit. Smoking damages your bronchial tree and makes it easier for viruses to cause infection. Smoking also slows down the bodies' natural healing process, so it takes longer for you to get well. Another way to keep from getting acute bronchitis is to wash your hands often to get rid of any viruses you may come in contact with.

### **You should call your doctor if:**

- You continue to wheeze and cough for more than one month, especially at night or when you are active.
- You develop a high fever that doesn't go down.
- You cough up blood.
- You have trouble breathing when you lay down.
- Your feet swell.