

# Acute Bronchitis

## What is acute bronchitis?

Bronchitis is an infection of the air passages--that is, the tubes that connect the windpipe to the lungs. It causes swelling and irritation of the airways.

## What is the cause?

Bronchitis often occurs with viral infections of the respiratory tract, such as colds and flu. Bronchitis may also be caused by bacterial infections. It may occur with childhood illnesses such as measles and whooping cough.

Attacks are frequent during the winter or when the level of air pollution is high.

Infants, young children, older adults, smokers, and people with heart disease or lung disease (including asthma and allergies) are most likely to get acute bronchitis.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- A deep cough that produces yellowish or greenish phlegm
- Pain behind the breastbone when you breathe deeply or cough
- Wheezing
- Feeling short of breath
- Fever
- Chills
- Headache
- Sore muscles

## How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and examine you. You may have tests, such as:

- A test of phlegm to look for bacteria
- Chest X-ray
- Blood tests

## How is it treated?

Acute bronchitis often does not need medical treatment. All you may need to do to get better in a few days is:

- Rest at home.
- Drink more liquids (water or tea) to help you cough up mucus more easily.

If your symptoms are severe or you have other health problems (such as heart or lung disease or diabetes), you may need to take antibiotics. If you are wheezing, you may need an inhaler medicine to make it easier to breathe.

### **How long will the effects last?**

Most of the time acute bronchitis clears up in a few days. Your cough may slowly get better in 1 to 2 weeks.

It may take you longer to recover if:

- You are a smoker.
- You live in an area where air pollution is a problem.
- You have a heart or lung disease, including asthma.
- You have other health problems.

### **How can I take care of myself?**

Follow the full treatment prescribed by your healthcare provider. In addition you can:

- Use a humidifier or steam from hot water to add moisture to the air.
- Take a hot shower to help loosen the phlegm.
- Drink plenty of liquids.
- Take cough medicine if recommended by your healthcare provider.
- Rest in bed.
- Eat healthy meals.
- Take aspirin or acetaminophen to reduce fever and relieve headache and muscle pain. Check with your healthcare provider before you give any medicine that contains aspirin or salicylates to a child or teen. This includes medicines like baby aspirin, some cold medicines, and Pepto-Bismol. Children and teens who take aspirin are at risk for a serious illness called Reye's syndrome.

Ask your provider:

- How and when you will hear your test results
- How long it will take to recover
- What activities you should avoid and when you can return to your normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

## **How can I help prevent acute bronchitis?**

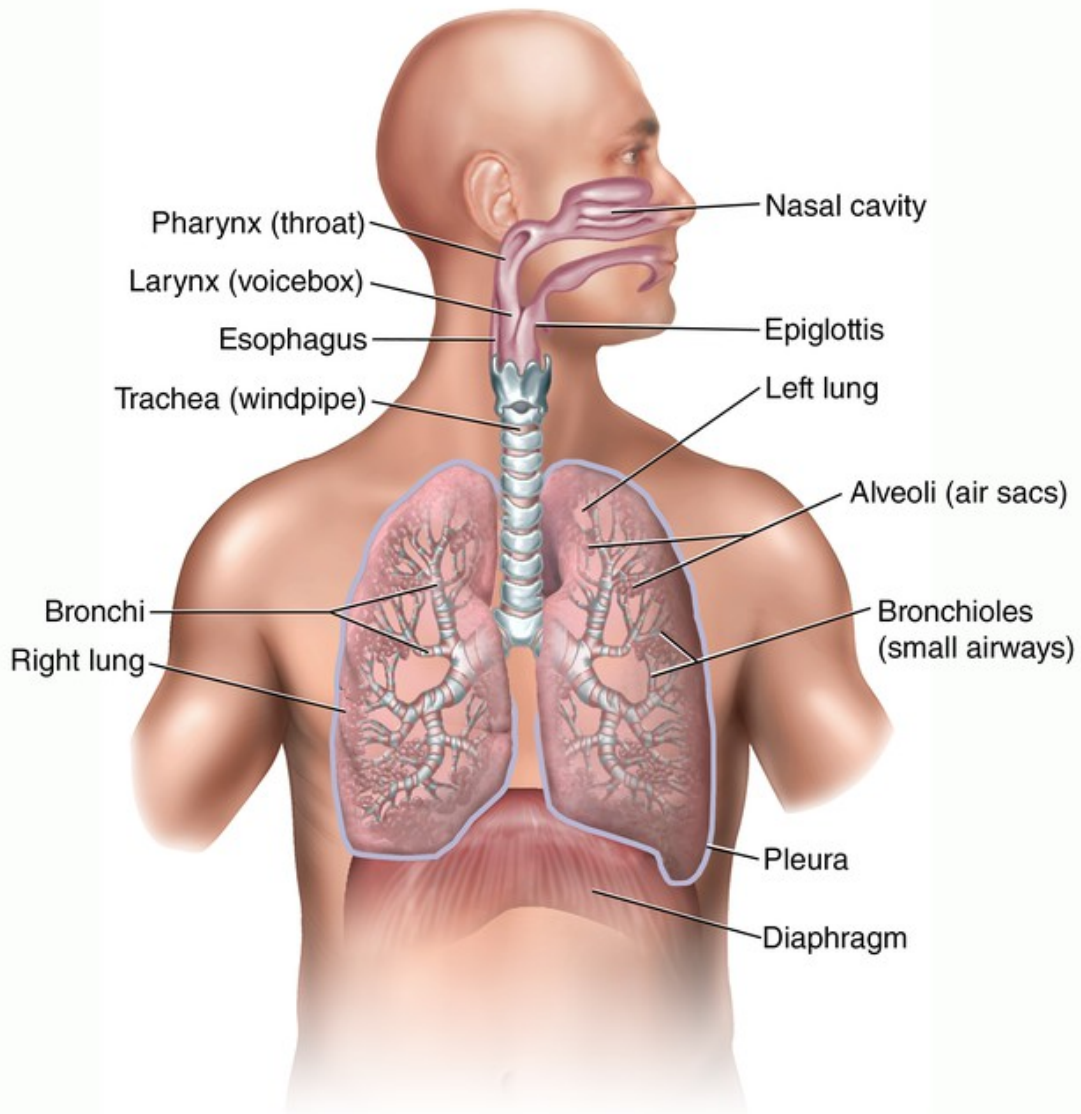
To reduce your risk of getting a respiratory infection:

- Don't smoke.
- Avoid secondhand smoke.
- Wash your hands often, especially when you are around people with colds (upper respiratory infections).
- If you have asthma or allergies, keep your symptoms under good control.
- Get regular exercise.
- Eat healthy foods.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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# Respiratory System



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