

Preventing and Treating Bronchitis

Cough keeping you up at night? Soreness in your chest and feeling tired? You could have acute bronchitis, but be aware: an antibiotic will not help you get better.



What is Acute Bronchitis?

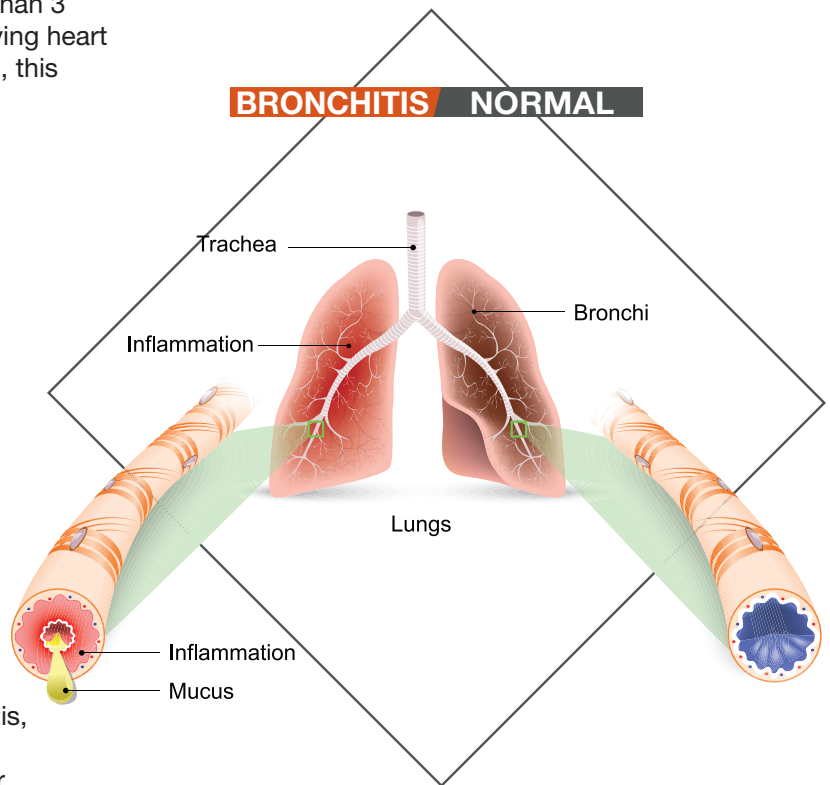
Bronchitis occurs when the airways of the lungs swell and produce mucus. That's what makes you cough. Acute bronchitis, often called a "chest cold," is the most common type of bronchitis. The symptoms last less than 3 weeks. If you're a healthy person without underlying heart or lung problems or a weakened immune system, this information is for you.

Symptoms

- ◆ Coughing with or without mucus production
- ◆ Soreness in the chest
- ◆ Fatigue (feeling tired)
- ◆ Mild headache
- ◆ Mild body aches
- ◆ Watery eyes
- ◆ Sore throat

Causes

- ◆ Acute bronchitis is usually caused by a virus and often occurs after an upper respiratory infection.
- ◆ Bacteria can sometimes cause acute bronchitis, but even in these cases antibiotics are NOT recommended and will not help you get better.



When to Seek Medical Care

See a healthcare professional if you or your child have any of the following:

- ◆ Temperature of 100.4°F or higher
- ◆ Cough with bloody mucus
- ◆ Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- ◆ Symptoms that last more than 3 weeks
- ◆ Repeated episodes of bronchitis



Treatment

Acute bronchitis usually gets better on its own—without antibiotics. **Antibiotics won't help you get better if you have acute bronchitis.**

When antibiotics aren't needed, they won't help you, and the side effects could still cause harm. Side effects can range from minor issues, like a rash, to very serious health problems, such as antibiotic-resistant infections and *C. diff* infection, which causes diarrhea that can lead to severe colon damage and death.

If you have whooping cough (pertussis) or pneumonia, which can have similar symptoms to acute bronchitis, your doctor will most likely prescribe antibiotics.

How to Feel Better

- ◆ Get plenty of rest.
- ◆ Drink plenty of fluids.
- ◆ Use a clean humidifier, cool mist vaporizer, or saline nose drops to relieve a stuffy nose.
 - » For young children, use a rubber suction bulb to clear mucus.
- ◆ Breathe in steam from a bowl of hot water or shower.
- ◆ Suck on lozenges. Do not give lozenges to children younger than 4 years old.
- ◆ Use honey to relieve cough for persons at least 1 year old.
- ◆ Ask your doctor or pharmacist about over-the-counter medicines that can help you feel better. Always use over-the-counter medicines as directed. Remember, over-the-counter medicines may provide temporary relief of symptoms, but they will not cure your illness.

Remember, always use over-the-counter medicines as directed. **Be careful about giving over-the-counter medicines to children. Not all over-the-counter medicines are recommended for children of certain ages.**

- ◆ Pain relievers:
 - » Children younger than 6 months: only give acetaminophen.
 - » Children 6 months or older: it is OK to give acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
 - » Never give aspirin to children because it can cause Reye's syndrome, a rare but very serious illness that harms the liver and brain.
- ◆ Cough and cold medicines:
 - » Children younger than 4 years old: do not use unless a doctor specifically tells you to. Use of over-the-counter cough and cold medicines in young children can result in serious and potentially life-threatening side effects.
 - » Children 4 years or older: discuss with your child's doctor if over-the-counter cough and cold medicines are safe to give to your child for temporary symptom relief.

Prevention

- ◆ Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- ◆ Make sure you and your child are up-to-date with all recommended vaccines.
- ◆ Don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke, chemicals, dust, or air pollution.
- ◆ Always cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- ◆ Keep your distance from others when you are sick, if possible.

Antibiotics will not treat acute bronchitis. Using antibiotics when not needed could do more harm than good.

