

Patient Education Sheet

What is Pneumonia?

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Pneumonia is an inflammation and infection of one or both of the lungs. It is caused by a bacterial, viral or fungal infection and causes severe inflammation. This inflammation can make breathing difficult and sometimes painful. Aspiration pneumonia is a type of pneumonia that can occur when a foreign substance such as food or liquid enters the lungs.

The severity of your pneumonia depends on several factors. This includes your overall health condition, the type and extent of pneumonia, and whether you have other medical conditions. You are more likely to develop complications from pneumonia if you have a history of heart failure, other lung ailments such as emphysema, or if you are older.

Pneumonia could take several weeks to months to fully resolve depending upon your other health conditions. The goal of your hospital team is to *begin* treatment of your illness so that you can safely return to the comfort of your home to complete your recovery.

What are the symptoms of pneumonia?

The symptoms of pneumonia may include one or more of the following:

- Shortness of breath
- Fever and sweating
- Cough
- Wheezing

- Chills
- Chest pain
- Increased mucus production
- Loss of appetite
- Generalized weakness

How is pneumonia diagnosed?

Your physician may suspect pneumonia based on your medical history and a physical exam. Your physician may also order:

- A chest x-ray to confirm the diagnosis of pneumonia and to determine the severity of the infection
- Blood work to check for the presence of bacteria, viruses, or other organisms in your body that may be causing the infection
- A sputum sample to help identify the organism that is causing the infection.

Once the organism is identified, your physician can then target the necessary treatment.

How is pneumonia treated?

There are various treatments for pneumonia. Your physician will plan your treatment based on the type of pneumonia you have and the symptoms that you are experiencing. Rest and fluids are usually recommended. You may have an intravenous catheter for a short period of time for extra fluids. You may also have oxygen therapy to help you breathe easier.

If your pneumonia is caused by a bacterial infection, you will probably

be given antibiotics to start while at the hospital and to continue once you are home. It is important to finish all of this medication, even if you are starting to feel better. The pneumonia may come back if you do not complete your medication prescription as directed.

If your pneumonia is caused by a virus, antibiotics will not be effective. Viral infections generally resolve on their own with supportive medications prescribed to relieve the symptoms. These medications may include cough and fever medicines, decongestants, and/or sometimes inhalers depending on the severity.

What can I do to aid in my recovery?

Activities you will be encouraged to do to assist you in recovering while in the hospital include:

- Participating in your daily care
- Getting out of bed frequently during the day to help loosen congestion in your lungs
- Eating the nutritious meals provided

How can I prevent pneumonia?

The organisms that cause pneumonia can be contagious and are spread through coughing and sneezing. If you have pneumonia, prevent spreading it to others. Do not visit older people, babies or others who are ill to prevent spreading the infection to them. Good hygiene habits include:

- Use of tissues when coughing or sneezing to cover your mouth to prevent the spread of

infection in the air; and dispose of tissues in the garbage

- Frequent hand washing to prevent spreading the infection, especially after coughing or sneezing.

The pneumonia vaccine is an important step for you toward preventing a recurrence of bacterial or pneumococcal pneumonia. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), pneumococcal pneumonia accounts for 25% - 35% of all pneumonias leading to hospital stays and results in 7,000 to 13,000 deaths per year in the United States. Some facts about the pneumonia vaccine:

- The vaccine is safe
- Revaccination depends on a person's age and health status. Check with your physician regarding vaccination and revaccination.
- The pneumococcal vaccine is effective for preventing pneumonia caused by bacterial infections in adults and children at least 2 years of age.
- Vaccination is recommended for persons 65 years old or older.
- Individuals who received their first pneumococcal vaccine prior to age 65, may be revaccinated at age 65, if greater than 5 years have elapsed since the previous does.
- During flu season, the flu vaccine is also recommended since pneumonia often occurs as a complication of the flu.

Source:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention @ www.cdc.gov
National Library of Medicine @ www.medlineplus.com