

What is Bronchitis?

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Bronchitis is an inflammation of the bronchial tubes, the tubes that carry oxygen to the lungs. When the bronchial tubes are inflamed, they become swollen and produce mucus. This may trigger coughing and make it more difficult to breathe.

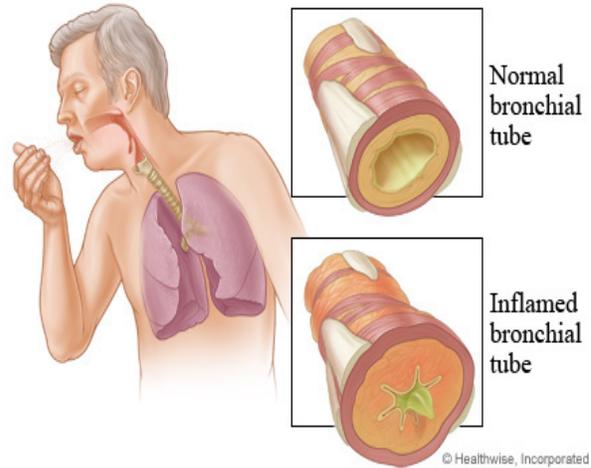
There are two types of bronchitis:

- Acute Bronchitis – This develops quickly and it may last 2 to 3 weeks in otherwise healthy people. Acute bronchitis is usually caused by one of a number of viruses or bacteria that can infect the bronchial tubes and lungs. Most healthy people who develop acute bronchitis recover without complications.
- Chronic Bronchitis – This is an inflammation of the bronchial tubes that continues several months to years. It causes irritation and excessive mucus production. The most common cause of this form of bronchitis is smoking.

Those with chronic bronchitis are more susceptible to bacterial infections, such as pneumonia.

What are the possible symptoms of bronchitis?

- Cough that may bring up clear, yellow, or green mucus.
- A mild fever
- A general feeling of weakness
- Chills
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing or a whistling sound with breathing



What causes bronchitis?

You may become infected with the viruses or bacteria that cause acute bronchitis by breathing in air that contains droplets from infected persons when they cough or sneeze. You can also become infected if you touch a hand that is coated with the virus and then touch your mouth or nose before washing your hands.

Those at risk for developing chronic bronchitis either smoke or are around someone else who smokes; or they are exposed to chemical fumes or pollutants over long periods of time.

How is bronchitis diagnosed?

There are no routine tests for bronchitis. Diagnosis is usually based on your medical history and a physical exam. Your physician may also rule out other conditions, such as pneumonia. A chest X-ray may be done for infants or older adults. Your physician may also order blood work and ask you for a sputum sample to identify if you have a viral or bacterial infection.

How is bronchitis treated?

Treatment for normally healthy people usually includes steps to reduce the cough and fever. Drinking plenty of fluids and taking cough drops may help to relieve the cough. Over-the-counter mild pain relievers, such as acetaminophen or aspirin, will help to reduce fever and pain. Antibiotics are generally not helpful except for the more unusual cases caused by bacteria. If the bronchitis produces enough narrowing of the airways to cause shortness of breath or wheezing, your physician may prescribe medications to open the airways.

For those with heart or lung conditions, such as heart failure, emphysema, or asthma, evaluation and treatment may be more extensive.

When should I call my physician?

Call your physician if you:

- Have increased shortness of breath after any physical activity
- Notice new or increased wheezing (whistling sound) when breathing or difficulty breathing
- Have a cough that produces increased amounts of thick yellow or green sputum, lasts longer than 2 days, or you have a fever of 101° F or higher
- Cough up streaks of blood

Sources:

American Academy of Family Physicians @ <http://familydoctor.org>

Danbury Hospital Illness and Conditions @ www.danburyhospital.org

Nemours Foundation @ <http://kidshealth.org>