

Bounce Back from Bronchitis

Bronchitis can be either acute or chronic depending on how long it lasts and how serious the damage. Acute bronchitis is inflammation of the air passages of the lung. Chronic bronchitis is inflammation and degeneration of the air passages of the lung.

Acute bronchitis is generally caused by a viral or bacterial infection or an environmental pollutant, like smog or tobacco smoke. Acute bronchitis often develops in the wake of a sinus infection, cold, or other respiratory infection and can last anywhere from three days to three weeks. Coughing is often the first sign of acute bronchitis and it may be accompanied by chills, low-grade fever, sore throat, and muscle aches. Symptoms go away when the acute episode is over.

Treatment includes:

- Not smoking and avoiding secondhand smoke.
- Breathing air from a steam vaporizer.
- Bronchodilators (prescription drugs that open up the bronchial passages).
- An antibiotic if you smoke, are older than age 40, or if you have a condition or take medication that makes it hard for you to fight infections.
- An over-the-counter medicine for fever and aches.
- Bed rest.
- Drinking plenty of liquids.

As you feel better, you can gradually resume your normal activities. But be patient. Full recovery from acute bronchitis can take up to four weeks. (If acute symptoms last longer than a week or get worse, see a doctor. You may be developing pneumonia.)

In chronic bronchitis, the airways produce too much mucus, enough to cause a daily cough that brings up the mucus, for as long as three or more months, for more than two years in a row. Many people – most of them men – develop emphysema (destruction of the air sacs) along with chronic bronchitis. Because chronic bronchitis results in abnormal air exchange in the lung and causes permanent damage to the respiratory tract, it's much more serious than acute bronchitis.

Signs of chronic bronchitis are:

- Shortness of breath upon exertion (in early stages).
- Shortness of breath at rest (in later stages).
- A cough that produces thick, yellowish phlegm.

People living in heavily industrialized urban areas and exposed to air pollution, workers exposed to metallic dust or fibers, and people who smoke are most susceptible to chronic bronchitis. In fact, cigarette smoking is the most common cause of chronic bronchitis. So quitting is essential and may

bring complete relief.

Here are some other helpful steps.

- Reduce your exposure to air pollution. (Use air conditioning, air filters, and a mouth filter, if you have to.) If you develop bronchitis easily, stay indoors during episodes of heavy air pollution.
- Use cough suppressants sparingly. Instead, use expectorants, bronchodilators, and antibiotics (under a doctor's supervision, of course).

If you have any symptoms of bronchitis lasting longer than a week, see your physician.