

ASBESTOSIS



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Inflammation of the lung due to breathing asbestos particles. It is a chronic disorder, but is not contagious. It may lead to cancer of the lung (greatly increased in cigarette smokers). Men over age 40 who have been exposed to asbestos are more likely to be affected. It is probably the single most important work-related lung disease.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Early symptoms:

- Shortness of breath.
- Cough that produces little or no sputum.
- General ill feeling.

Late symptoms:

- Fitful sleep.
- Appetite loss.
- Chest pain.
- Hoarseness.
- Coughing blood.
- Symptoms of congestive heart failure.
- Bluish nails.

CAUSES

Long-term exposure to small particles of asbestos at work or from other sources. The outer part of the lung becomes irritated by the asbestos fibers, leading to inflammation and to a thickening and scarring of the lung tissue (pulmonary fibrosis). Up to 20 years or more may elapse between exposure to asbestos and the symptoms of the disease.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Occupations involving asbestos-related industry.
- Poor nutrition.
- Smoking.
- Excess alcohol consumption.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- During exposure to asbestos, wear a protective mask or external-air-supplied hood.
- Follow recommended industrial procedures to suppress asbestos dust.
- Don't smoke.
- Participate in a regular physical exercise program to maintain good cardiopulmonary fitness.
- For workers in asbestos industries, regular scheduled X-rays to detect any shadow on the lungs. If so, the person should stop working with asbestos, even if there are no symptoms.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- This condition is currently considered incurable. However, symptoms can be relieved or controlled.
- Scientific research into causes and treatment continues, so there is hope for increasingly effective treatment and cure.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Tuberculosis.
- Heart failure due to lung disease.
- Lung collapse.
- Pleurisy.
- Lung cancer.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Stop smoking.
- Obtain medical treatment for any respiratory infection, including the common cold.
- Consider moving to a warm, dry climate if you have advanced disease.
- Chest physical therapy techniques will be provided by respiratory therapist.
- Learn and practice bronchial drainage.
- Use a cool-mist humidifier to loosen bronchial secretions so they can be coughed up easily.
- Keep influenza and pneumococcal immunizations up-to-date.
- Avoid crowds and persons with infections.
- Additional information available from the Asbestos Victims of America, P.O. Box 559, Capitola, CA 95010, (408) 476-3646; or from the American Lung Association, 1740 Broadway, New York, NY 10019, (800) 586-4872.

MEDICATIONS

- Antibiotics for infections.
- Bronchodilators (inhaled or oral) with inhalation therapy (supervised at first by an inhalation therapist) to open bronchial tubes to the maximum.
- For minor discomfort, use non-prescription drugs, such as acetaminophen or aspirin.
- Supplemental oxygen may be necessary.

ACTIVITY

- Rest in bed with infections.
- After treatment, resume normal activity as soon as symptoms improve.
- Regular exercise in whatever form tolerated is important to preserve lung capacity.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of asbestosis.
- The following occur during treatment:
 - Temperature spike of 101° F (38.3° C) or more.
 - Increased chest pain or breathlessness.
 - Blood in the sputum.
 - Continuing weight loss.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.