

ATELECTASIS



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Collapse of part or all of one lung, preventing normal oxygen absorption.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Sudden, major collapse:

- Chest pain.
- Shortness of breath; rapid breathing.
- Shock (severe weakness, paleness of skin, rapid heart-beat).
- Dizziness.

Gradual collapse:

- Cough.
- Fever.
- Shortness of breath.
- No other symptoms.

CAUSES

Obstruction of small or large lung air passages by:

- Thick mucous plugs from infection or other disease, including cystic fibrosis.
- Tumors in the air passages.
- Tumors or blood vessels outside the air passages, causing pressure on airways.
- Inhaled objects, such as small toys or peanuts.
- Prolonged chest or abdominal surgery with general anesthetic.
- Chest injury or fractured ribs.
- Penetrating wound.
- Enlarged lymph glands.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Smoking.
- Illness that has lowered resistance or weakened the patient.
- Chronic obstructive lung disease, including emphysema and bronchiectasis.
- Use of drugs that depress alertness or consciousness, such as sedatives, barbiturates, tranquilizers or alcohol.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Force coughing and deep breathing every 1 to 2 hours after surgery with general anesthesia. Also change position often in bed, if possible.
- Increase fluid intake during lung illness or after surgery by mouth or intravenously to keep lung secretions loose.
- Keep small objects that might be inhaled away from young children (peanuts are notorious).

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Atelectasis is seldom life-threatening and usually resolves spontaneously.
- If atelectasis is caused by a mucous plug or inhaled foreign object, it is curable when the plug or object is removed. If it is caused by a tumor, the outcome depends on the nature of the tumor.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Pneumonia.
- Small lung abscess.
- Permanent lung scars and collapsed lung tissue.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Laboratory studies to measure oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood and X-rays of the chest.
- Surgery to remove tumors.
- Bronchoscopy to remove foreign objects or a mucous plug.
- Cooperate with requests to turn, cough and breathe deeply after surgery. Hold a pillow tightly against surgical incisions during the coughing exercises.
- Stop smoking.
- Learn to perform postural drainage after hospitalization. An inhalation therapist, nurse or doctor can demonstrate the technique.
- Additional information available from the American Lung Association, 1740 Broadway, New York, NY 10019, (800) 586-4872.

MEDICATIONS

- Antibiotics to fight infection that inevitably accompanies atelectasis.
- Pain relievers for minor pain.
- Don't take sedatives. They may contribute to a recurrence.

ACTIVITY

Resume your normal activities as soon as symptoms improve.

DIET

No special diet, but drink at least 8 glasses of water or other fluid daily to thin lung secretions.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of atelectasis.
- The following occur during treatment:
 - Distended abdomen.
 - Sudden shortness of breath.
 - Blue fingernails and lips.
 - Temperature of 102° F (38.9° C) or higher.