

# BRONCHITIS, CHRONIC

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## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Chronic inflammation and degeneration of the bronchial tubes, with or without active infection. It is most commonly associated with cigarette smoking.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Frequent cough or coughing spasms.
- Shortness of breath.
- Sputum that is thick and difficult to cough up. Sputum production varies according to whether infection is present.

### CAUSES

Repeated irritation or infection in the bronchial tubes, causing them to thicken, narrow and lose elasticity. Underlying irritants include allergens, air pollution and tobacco smoke.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Smoking (the greatest risk factor).
- Any lung illness that has lowered resistance.
- Family history of tuberculosis or other disease of the respiratory tract.
- Exposure to air pollutants.
- Poor nutrition.
- Obesity.
- Crowded living conditions.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Don't smoke. This is the most reversible risk.
- Avoid irritating fumes in the environment.
- Obtain prompt medical treatment for respiratory infections.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Chronic bronchitis is usually curable with treatment if you are a non-smoker and don't have an underlying chronic disease, such as congestive heart failure, bronchiectasis or tuberculosis.
- Chronic bronchitis usually reduces life expectancy if you smoke and don't stop, or if you have an underlying chronic disease.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Recurrent pneumonia.
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which is incurable. It is characterized by chronic shortness of breath, purple lips and nails and eventual necessity for oxygen supplement.



## TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Many lung and heart disorders cause symptoms identical to those of chronic bronchitis. Medical tests will exclude these possibilities to make a diagnosis.
- Treatment does not cure, but it can relieve symptoms and help prevent complications.
- Stop smoking.
- If you work or live in an area with heavy air pollution, do everything you can to avoid or reduce it. Consider changing jobs and installing air-conditioning with a filter and humidity control in your home.
- Avoid sudden temperature changes or exposure to cold, wet weather.
- Avoid shouting, laughing loudly, crying and exertion, if these trigger coughing episodes.
- Practice bronchial drainage and deep-breathing techniques. Your physician will provide instructions.
- Sleep with 5-inch blocks under the foot of your bed.
- Additional information available from the American Lung Association, 1740 Broadway, New York, NY 10019, (800) 586-4872.

### MEDICATIONS

- Don't take cough suppressants; they make chronic bronchitis worse.
- Antibiotics to fight chronic or recurrent infection.
- Expectorants to loosen secretions.
- Bronchodilators to open bronchial tubes.
- Drugs may be prescribed to treat severe depression or anxiety if they occur.

### ACTIVITY

No restrictions. A regular exercise routine is important as prolonged inactivity leads to excessive disability.

### DIET

No special diet. Increase fluid intake to 8 to 10 glasses a day to keep lung secretions thin.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of chronic bronchitis.
- Fever or vomiting occurs.
- Blood appears in the sputum.
- Chest pain increases.
- Shortness of breath occurs even when you are resting or not coughing.
- Sputum thickens despite efforts to thin it.