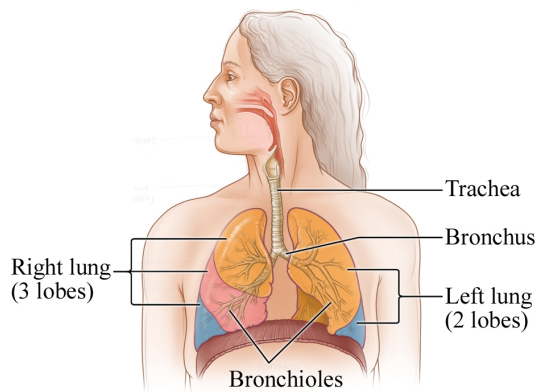


COPD: How to Treat Pneumonia at Home



Pneumonia is a lung infection that is usually caused by bacteria or a virus. If you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), pneumonia can cause serious breathing problems. COPD also makes it harder to clear mucus from your lungs.

Pneumonia may be mild or very severe. It may take a few weeks to a few months for you to recover, depending on how sick you are. You can sometimes treat pneumonia at home with proper care and under the direction of your doctor. However, you may need to go to the hospital if you are very sick or have severe problems breathing.

If you have COPD and pneumonia, you may need to take steroid medicines for a short period of time. It is important that you take them exactly as directed by your doctor for the complete course of treatment, or you may get sick again. These medicines have limited side effects when you take them for a short time.

Treatment for bacterial pneumonia

Doctors use antibiotics to treat pneumonia caused by bacteria. Your doctor will choose an

antibiotic based on your age, your symptoms, and whether you need to go to the hospital. The first antibiotic tried usually is one that works against a wide range of bacteria. This is called a broad-spectrum antibiotic. If you do not get better, or if you get worse, you may have tests to find the exact bacteria that are causing your illness. The tests can also show if the bacteria are resistant to the antibiotic.

Tips for taking antibiotics

- Tell your doctor about any medicines or herbal remedies you are taking. Some can interfere with antibiotics.
- If your doctor prescribes antibiotics, take them exactly as directed. Do not skip a dose or stop taking the medicine, even if you feel better. You need to take all of your medicine to avoid getting sick again.
- Never save antibiotics for the next time you get sick.
- Do not take antibiotics that were prescribed for someone else. They may not work for your illness, and your treatment could take longer.

Viral pneumonia

Pneumonia also can be caused by viruses, such as those that cause the flu and chickenpox. Antibiotics do not work for pneumonia caused by a virus. Varicella pneumonia, which is rare, can be treated with an antiviral medicine.

Caring for yourself at home

- Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) to help reduce fever and chest pain caused by coughing. **Ask your doctor before you take any over-the-counter medicines.**

- Get plenty of rest and sleep. You may feel weak and tired for up to 6 weeks, but your energy level will improve with time.
- Drink plenty of water or other clear liquids to prevent dehydration, unless your doctor tells you to restrict your fluids. If you have kidney, heart, or liver disease and have to limit fluids, talk with your doctor before you increase your fluid intake.
- Take care of your cough so you can rest. A cough that brings up mucus from your lungs is common with pneumonia and may last for weeks. However, if coughing keeps you from resting or causes severe fatigue and chest pain, talk to your doctor.
- If you need inhaled medicines, use them exactly as your doctor says.
- Use a humidifier to increase the moisture in the air. Dry air makes coughing worse. Follow the instructions for cleaning the machine.
- Do not smoke, and avoid others' smoke. Smoke will make your cough last longer.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Use tissues, and dispose of them promptly.
- If you were given a spirometer to measure how well your lungs are working, use it as instructed. This can help your doctor tell how your recovery is going.

When to call your doctor

If you have severe trouble breathing, call 911 immediately.

Call your doctor immediately if:

- You have shortness of breath or wheezing that is rapidly getting worse.
- You are coughing more deeply or more frequently, especially if you notice an

increase in mucus (sputum) or a change in the color of the mucus you cough up.

- You cough up blood.
- You have increased swelling in your legs or belly.
- You have a high fever (over 100°F).
- You feel severe chest pain.
- You develop flu symptoms.
- You notice that your medicine is not working as well as it had been.
- You use oxygen at home and feel like you need more. Use only the amount recommended by your doctor. In some people who have COPD, too much oxygen can be dangerous.
- You are on oxygen and you become sluggish or unresponsive.

If your symptoms suddenly get worse, you may be having a COPD flare-up, or exacerbation. Quick treatment may help you to prevent serious breathing problems and avoid a hospital stay.

Call your doctor if:

- You have a fever with a severe headache and a stiff neck.
- You have signs of needing more fluids. You may have sunken eyes, a dry mouth, and pass only a little dark urine.
- You cannot keep down fluids or medicine.
- You have a deep cough and a lot of mucus.
- You are too tired to eat or drink.
- You have a new symptom, such as a sore throat, earache, or a rash.
- You do not get better as expected.
- You have any problems with your medicine.

