

Acute Bronchitis

Acute bronchitis is an infection of the bronchial (“brawn-kee-ull”) tree. The bronchial tree is made of tubes that carry air into your lungs. When these tubes get infected, they swell and mucus (thick fluid) forms inside of them. This can make it hard for you to breathe. You may cough up mucus and even wheeze at times. Acute bronchitis can affect all ages.

Acute bronchitis is almost always caused by viruses that attack the lining of the bronchial tree. It takes time for your body to kill the viruses and heal the damage to your bronchii. Viruses are sprayed into the air or onto people’s hand when they cough. You can breathe in these viruses or touch a hand that is coated with virus. You are more likely to get bronchitis if you smoke or work around toxic fumes as your bronchial tree is already damaged.

Possible signs and symptoms of bronchitis include:

- A common cold or sore throat that may occur prior to bronchitis
- Cough that produces little or no mucus at first, but then can become productive
- Low fever (usually less than 101)
- Burning feeling in chest. Feeling of pressure behind breastbone
- Wheezing, possible trouble breathing
- Fatigue

Most cases of bronchitis will go away on their own after a few days or a week. It is important to get plenty of rest and increase noncaffeinated fluids. Using a humidifier in your house can help with cough. Mucinex can help if you are beginning to develop a lot of mucus. Because bronchitis is usually caused by a virus, antibiotics usually do not help. If you smoke, you need to stop smoking or significantly decrease the number of cigarettes you smoke. Some people will be treated for asthma and may be given an inhaler. Sometimes the cough from acute bronchitis can last several weeks or months. You may need some prescription cough medicine if you are unable to sleep at night.

Complications of acute bronchitis:

- Pneumonia
- Chronic bronchitis
- Bronchiectasis (bronchial tubes become blocked)
- Pleurisy (inflammation and pain of the lining of the lung)

Tips to prevent acute bronchitis:

- Avoid people who are actively sick with cough
- Wash your hands frequently
- If you smoke, you need to stop smoking

Contact our clinic or go to the Emergency Room if you develop increasing fever, shortness of breath, chest pain or worsening fatigue. Also return if you do not have any improvement in 7-10 days after onset of symptoms.