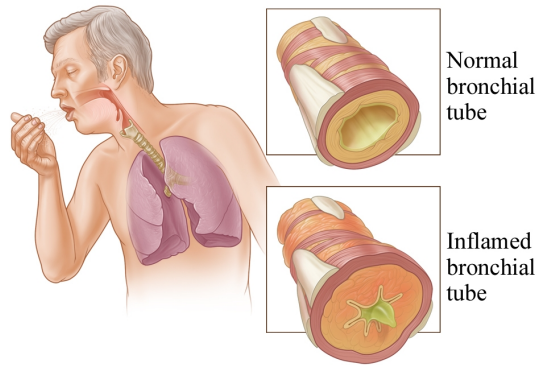


Bronchitis: Chronic Bronchitis



Bronchitis causes swelling and irritation in the airways that lead to the lungs. Over time, tobacco smoke or other lung irritants can lead to long-term (chronic) bronchitis. It causes breathing problems and shortness of breath.

Chronic bronchitis means you have a cough with mucus most days of the month for 3 months of the year and for at least 2 years in a row.

Chronic bronchitis, like emphysema, is a form of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

As COPD gets worse over time, you have more and more trouble breathing, and physical activity becomes harder. Later, you may need oxygen on a regular basis.

What causes chronic bronchitis?

Chronic bronchitis is most often caused by smoking cigarettes.

It can also be caused or made worse by:

- Secondhand tobacco smoke.
- Breathing dirty air at a job such as manufacturing, mining, or handling grain.
- Living in an area with severe air pollution.

- Allergies.
- Lung infections.

What are the signs of bronchitis?

When you have bronchitis, you cough often and have too much mucus. You may be short of breath, especially when you exert yourself.

Other symptoms of bronchitis include wheezing and feeling tired.

When you have bronchitis, you are more likely to get infections in your lungs and airways. A common sign of lung infection is yellow or green mucus, or an increase in the amount of mucus you produce.

How do healthy lungs work?

There are airways in your lungs called bronchial tubes that divide into very small branches. The branches end in tiny air sacs called alveoli. The air sacs in your lungs are surrounded by tiny blood vessels.

When you breathe in, oxygen moves out of the air sacs and into the blood vessels and then on to your bloodstream. At the same time, carbon dioxide moves out of your blood and into the air sacs. You remove the carbon dioxide from your lungs when you breathe out.

This process is called respiration.

What happens when you have bronchitis?

In healthy lungs, air can flow in and out of the lungs easily through the bronchial tubes. When you have bronchitis, these tubes get swollen and irritated. They produce thick mucus.

The swelling and mucus narrow or block your airways and make it hard for you to breathe.

When this happens over many years, it can lead to permanent lung damage. The swelling and mucus may even block some tubes completely.

Over time, bronchitis can permanently damage your airways and lungs.

Questions to ask your doctor

Use the space below to list your questions or concerns. Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit.

Questions about chronic bronchitis: