

Chest Infection

What is "a chest infection"?

We tend to refer to lower respiratory tract infections (acute bronchitis or community-acquired pneumonia), as "chest infections": defined as an acute illness usually with cough as the main symptom and with at least one other symptom such as fever, phlegm, breathlessness, wheeze or chest discomfort not due to a cause like sinusitis or asthma

What are the symptoms?

- Chesty cough
- Wheezing or shortness of breath
- Chest pain or discomfort
- High temperature
- Headache
- Aching muscles
- Tiredness



How is it treated?

Most acute bronchitis infections clear up on their own within 3-4 weeks if you are not at higher risk of complications or are extremely unwell:

- Antibiotics do not make a large difference to the duration of symptoms, only shortening cough duration by about half a day on average; and adverse effects such as diarrhoea and nausea can occur with antibiotic treatment. Unnecessary antibiotic prescriptions may result in antibiotic resistance, and treatment not working if it is needed in the future
- If an antibiotic is needed, options include a 5 day course of amoxicillin or doxycycline
- You will not usually be given an inhaler or course of oral steroids unless you are asthmatic

How can I help myself?

- Rest, drink plenty of water, and take paracetamol if needed for pain relief
- Raise your head up while sleeping (use extra pillows) to make breathing easier
- Drink a hot lemon and honey drink to relieve a sore throat
- If you have suspected community-acquired pneumonia, over the counter cough medicines are not recommended, but if you have acute bronchitis you could use them to aid symptom relief
- To avoid passing a chest infection on to others, cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze, wash your hands regularly, throw away used tissues immediately
- If you keep getting chest infections or you're at risk of getting one, ask the pharmacy or GP about the annual flu vaccine or pneumococcal vaccine, try to quit smoking if you smoke and cut down on how much alcohol you drink



<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pneumonia/>



<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/chest-infection/>

When should I seek further help?

- Your symptoms worsen significantly or rapidly at any time
- You cough up blood or blood-stained mucus
- You have chest pain that comes and goes, or happens when breathing or coughing
- Call 999 if: you're struggling to breathe, you're choking, gasping and unable to speak; you have pale, blue or blotchy skin, lips or tongue; you suddenly feel confused

Adapted from NICE CKS - Chest infections - adult:
<https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/chest-infections-adult/>