

Preventing and Managing Chest Cold (Acute Bronchitis)



Cough keeping you up at night? Congestion? Sore throat? You may have a chest cold (acute bronchitis). Antibiotics will not help you feel better if you have a chest cold.

What is a Chest Cold (Acute Bronchitis)?

Acute bronchitis (often called a “chest cold”) occurs when the airways of the lungs swell and produce mucus. That’s what makes you cough. The symptoms of acute bronchitis last less than three weeks. If you’re a healthy person without underlying heart or lung problems or a weakened immune system, this information is for you.

Causes

A virus usually causes a chest cold. Bacteria can sometimes cause a chest cold, but even in these cases, antibiotics are NOT recommended and will not help you feel better.

When to Seek Medical Care*

See a healthcare professional if you have any of the following:

- Fever that lasts longer than 5 days or fever of 104°F or higher
- Cough with bloody mucus
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- Symptoms that last more than 3 weeks
- Repeated episodes of bronchitis

* This list is not all-inclusive. Please see a healthcare professional for any symptom that is severe or concerning.



Talk to a healthcare professional right away if your child is under 3 months old with a fever of 100.4 °F (38 °C) or higher.

Symptoms



Coughing with or without mucus



Feeling tired



Congestion



Sore throat



Mild body aches

Treatment

Acute bronchitis usually gets better on its own—without antibiotics. **Antibiotics won't help you get better if you have a chest cold.**



Anytime antibiotics are used, they can cause side effects from mild rashes to serious health problems like severe allergic reactions, antimicrobial-resistant infections and *C. diff* (an infection causing diarrhea that can lead to severe colon damage and death).

If you have whooping cough (pertussis) or pneumonia, which can have similar symptoms to acute bronchitis, a healthcare professional will most likely prescribe antibiotics.

Over-the-Counter Medicines

Ask a healthcare professional about over-the-counter medicines that can help you feel better.

- Over-the-counter medicines may provide temporary relief of symptoms, but they will not cure your illness.
- Always read over-the-counter medicine product labels and use as directed.
- Tell a healthcare professional about all prescription and other over-the-counter medicines you are taking.

Some over-the-counter medicines are not recommended for children of certain ages.

Ask a healthcare professional about the right dosage of over-the-counter medicines for your child's age and size and follow all directions.

- **Pain relievers and fever reducers:**
 - Children younger than 3 months: do not give pain relievers or fever reducers unless a healthcare professional tells you to do so.
 - Children between 3 months and 6 months: only give acetaminophen.
 - Children 6 months or older: it is OK to give acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- **Cough and cold medicines:**
 - Children younger than 6 years: over-the-counter cough/cold medicines are not recommended and can result in serious and sometimes life-threatening side effects.
 - Children 6 years or older: discuss the use of over-the-counter cough and cold medicines with a healthcare professional.

How to Feel Better

- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Use a clean humidifier or cool mist vaporizer.
- Use saline nasal spray or drops.
 - For young children, use a rubber suction bulb to clear mucus.
- Breathe in steam from a bowl of hot water or shower.
 - For young children, sit with the child in a bathroom filled with steam from a running shower.
- Use throat lozenges or cough drops. Do not give lozenges to children younger than 4 years of age.
- Use pasteurized honey to relieve cough for adults and children at least 1 year of age or older.

Prevention

CDC recommends that all people use core prevention strategies to protect themselves and others:

- Stay up to date with recommended vaccines and boosters.
- Practice good hygiene (practices that improve cleanliness).
- Take steps for cleaner air.

CDC's Respiratory Virus Guidance provides practical recommendations and information to help people lower their risk from a range of common respiratory viral illnesses.

For more information, visit:

[cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/guidance/](https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/guidance/)



Learn more at
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