Bronchitis

Bronchitis causes a cough that can make your chest hurt and disturb your sleep. It usually gets better on its own in a week or two, but you may need to see your doctor.

What is bronchitis?

If you have bronchitis, the lining of the airways in your lungs gets inflamed. This makes you cough.

Almost all cases of bronchitis are caused by infection with a virus and get better after about three or four weeks.

Bronchitis often starts as you're getting over another illness affecting the airways, such as a cold or flu. As your body fights off the virus, the lining of the airways in your lungs gets inflamed and coated with mucus.

Children under age 4 and older people are most likely to get bronchitis, especially if they already have other health problems that affect their lungs and heart.

What are the symptoms?

The main symptom of bronchitis is a bad cough. You may feel generally unwell, have a slight fever, and have aching muscles.

You may wheeze (make a whistling sound when you breathe) and feel short of breath. The constant coughing can make your chest hurt. Some people cough up mucus.

You should go to the doctor if you are worried about your symptoms or if you have other health problems like lung problems or heart disease. Young children with bronchitis should also see a doctor.

Some symptoms might mean you have a more serious condition. You should see your doctor if you:

- Have a high temperature (more than 38°C)
• Feel very out of breath

• Get bad chest pains

• Cough up a lot of green or yellow sputum, or any blood.

Your doctor may send you for a chest x-ray to see if you have pneumonia. Pneumonia happens when germs infect the lungs, making it difficult to breathe. If this happens you will need extra treatment, and maybe antibiotics.

**What treatments work?**

Bronchitis usually clears up on its own. You may find that painkillers, such as paracetamol, ease your symptoms. Remember to drink plenty of fluids. Hot drinks can be comforting.

**Medicines**

Medicines called cough suppressants are meant to stop you coughing. Some people with a cough find them useful to get a good night's sleep.

Cough medicines called expectorants are meant to help you cough up mucus. You can buy lots of different sorts from the pharmacy. But there's no research to say that drugs which aim to clear mucus will help bronchitis.

If you are wheezing a lot, your doctor may recommend an inhaler like those used for people with asthma. This may reduce cough and wheezing while you are getting better. But it will not clear up the bronchitis faster.

Antibiotics may clear up your cough about half a day sooner, if your bronchitis is caused by a bacteria. Most cases of bronchitis are caused by a virus and antibiotics don't work.

Doctors don't usually prescribe antibiotics for bronchitis because they don't help everyone, they don't make much difference, and they can cause side effects.

**What will happen to me?**

Your cough should clear up in about seven to 10 days, but it could last longer. Many people cough for three weeks or more. If you have a very bad cough with other symptoms, like a high fever, you should see your doctor.

Some other conditions can be made worse by bronchitis. For example, if you have asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or heart disease, bronchitis may make this worse. You should see your doctor if this happens. Your doctor may need to adjust your usual treatment to help. Smoking makes bronchitis worse, and you should try to stop.