

# PNEUMONIA: THE IMPORTANCE OF AN EARLY DIAGNOSIS

## TRANSCRIPT (page 1 of 2)

*"Mr. Copley, can you tell me a little bit about the trouble breathing you've been having?"*

Pneumonia is a serious lung infection affecting one or both of your lungs. When you have pneumonia, some of the millions of microscopic air sacs deep within your lungs, called alveoli, fill with fluid and mucus. Breathing can become difficult and painful.

But if treated promptly and correctly, your chances for a complete recovery are high. However, if left untreated, pneumonia can lead to serious complications, including an increased risk of re-infection, and possible permanent damage to your lungs.

One complication from bacterial pneumonia is the infection can enter your blood stream and infect other systems in your body. This can lead to other health issues.

Another risk of untreated pneumonia is fluid build-up within the space between the lungs and the chest wall, due to inflammation. This is called a pleural effusion. Breathing becomes painful because the lungs can't fully expand.

If the pleural effusion becomes infected, you have an empyema. The combination of infected fluid and pus puts pressure on the lungs, again making it more difficult and painful to breathe.

Untreated pneumonia can also lead to a lung abscess, where part of the lung tissue dies. And, in very rare cases, respiratory failure can occur. These complications can be reduced, or avoided altogether, with prompt diagnosis and proper treatment.

Your doctor relies on several tools to help diagnose pneumonia. The first is a physical exam. He will ask questions about your medical history and your symptoms.

*"It's just been hurting right in my chest, and then I've been spitting up a lot of brown colored sputum."*

He will listen for abnormal sounds in your chest and back as you breathe, check for fever, and look for a slight blue tint to your finger nails and skin. X-rays may be taken to confirm the diagnosis. The infected area of your lungs can clearly be seen on X-rays.

You may be asked to cough or spit up a sputum sample. Sputum is phlegm or mucus that is found in your airways and lungs. The sputum is tested to determine the kind of infection you have.

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Other lab tests may be ordered. On rare occasions, a CT scan or an MRI is used to help in the diagnosis. All of these test results will help your doctor confirm your diagnosis, and determine which treatment methods and medications to prescribe.

If you have any questions about the diagnostic tests your doctor orders, just ask. The sooner your doctor confirms your pneumonia, the faster you can begin to receive treatment. And that will help put you on the road to a healthy recovery.