

# Understanding Pneumonia

With every breath you take, your lungs pull air and oxygen into your body. When you breathe out, the lungs push carbon dioxide out of your body.

Oxygen-rich air travels through the bronchial tubes and then into even smaller tubes called bronchioles.

At the end of each bronchiole are tiny air sacs called alveoli. Each alveoli is wrapped in tiny blood vessels.

Lining the bronchial tubes are little hairs called cilia, coated with a layer of mucus to catch and hold tiny particles, including dust and germs. Coughing, sneezing, and clearing your throat usually moves this material out of your body.

But when you have pneumonia, germs enter the bronchial tubes and the bronchioles and infect the alveoli.

They fill with fluid and mucus. So your lungs have to work harder; and breathing becomes more difficult.

Symptoms of pneumonia may include a cough, a fever, shortness of breath, or the chills. You may feel very tired or very weak. Or you may have chest pain that often feels worse when you cough or breathe in.

Pneumonia that is caused by bacteria is treated with antibiotics. Rest, fluids, and medicines to reduce fever can help you feel better.

If your symptoms are bad or you have a weak immune system, you may need hospital care.

If pneumonia is caused by a virus, antibiotics don't help. Take care of yourself with rest, fluids, and medicines.

Another type of pneumonia is caused by inhaling fungal spores. The form of fungal pneumonia depends on the type of fungus native to the region where you live.

Fungal pneumonia is treated with antifungal medicines.

No matter what type of pneumonia you have, how severe it is and how long it lasts depends on many factors. These include your age, the type of pneumonia, and your overall health.

In healthy people, pneumonia can be a mild illness that clears up in 2 to 3 weeks. In older adults, young children, and in people with other health problems, recovery may take longer.

If you have severe pneumonia, you may have to go to the hospital.

Another type of pneumonia can happen when someone is in the hospital for another reason such as an illness or surgery.

It's called hospital-acquired pneumonia. It can be serious because they may already have a serious illness.

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Call your doctor right away if you think you may have pneumonia. With prompt and proper treatment, you'll feel better soon.

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