

Bronchiectasis

What is bronchiectasis?

Bronchiectasis (bron-kee-ek'-tas-is) is a chronic lung disease that can result from infections and swelling which injures the walls of the airways. The airways are the tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs.

Injury to the lung can cause problems with mucus buildup. The mucus creates a place in which germs can grow and lead to even more lung infections. Each infection causes more damage to the airways. Over time, the airways become stretched out, flabby, and scarred. When you breathe, it may be hard to move air in and out. This can affect how much oxygen reaches your other organs. If your lungs cannot move enough oxygen into your body, bronchiectasis can lead to serious illness, such as heart failure.

Bronchiectasis can affect just a part of one lung or many areas of both lungs. It often starts in childhood, but symptoms may not appear until months or even years, after you have started having frequent lung infections.

There are two types of bronchiectasis:

- **Acquired bronchiectasis:** This type occurs in adults and older children. This type is more common.
- **Congenital bronchiectasis:** This type you are born with and most often affects infants and children. About half of all cases result from a disease called cystic fibrosis

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms vary widely from patient to patient. The symptoms may include:

- Coughing (worse when lying down) and shortness of breath
- Weakness, weight loss, fatigue
- Tan or green, foul smelling or bloody mucus

How do I know if I have this?

Doctors test for this disease with a chest x-ray, breathing tests, sputum culture, and/or CT scan.

What is the treatment?

Patients are often given antibiotics for infection and medicines to open the airways. There are also airway clearance techniques or treatments to help clear lungs. Lung transplants may be an option for severe cases.

Can I prevent it?

If lung infections are treated right away, bronchiectasis is less likely to occur. Patients should avoid cigarette smoke and other lung irritants, and not use sedatives.

Questions?

If you have any questions or concerns, please call your health care provider.

For more information, see the American Lung Association website, www.lungusa.org

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 5/2020 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6503.