



Patient education: Community-acquired pneumonia in adults (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

Please read the [Disclaimer](#) at the end of this page.

What is pneumonia?

This is a lung infection that can cause coughing, fever, and trouble breathing ([figure 1](#)). The lung infection is often caused by bacteria, but it can also be caused by viruses or other germs.

Doctors use the term "community acquired" when a person catches an infection in their daily life, and not from being in the hospital. Doctors call it "hospital acquired" when people catch an infection from being in the hospital.

Community-acquired pneumonia can be mild or severe. A mild infection is sometimes called "walking pneumonia." That's because most people with walking pneumonia are not very sick and can still walk around and do their daily activities.

What are the symptoms of community-acquired pneumonia?

Common symptoms include:

- Cough – People sometimes cough up mucus (sputum).
- Fever
- Chest pain, especially when taking a deep breath
- Fast heartbeat
- Shaking chills

Should I see a doctor or nurse?

Yes. If you have the symptoms listed above, see a doctor or nurse as soon as possible.

Will I need tests?

Probably. Your doctor or nurse will ask about your symptoms and do an exam. They will probably do a chest X-ray to look for an infection in your lungs.

Depending on your individual situation, you might need other tests. These can include blood tests or lab tests on a sample of mucus that you cough up.

How is community-acquired pneumonia treated?

Doctors treat it with antibiotic medicines. These medicines kill the germs that are causing the infection. Most people can take antibiotic pills at home, but some people need to be treated in the hospital. People who are treated in the hospital usually get antibiotics through a thin tube that goes into a vein, called an "IV." Some people who are treated in the hospital also get extra oxygen to help them breathe more easily.

Most people start to feel better within 3 to 5 days of taking medicine. But a cough from pneumonia can last weeks or months after treatment. If your symptoms do not improve or get worse after starting treatment, tell your doctor or nurse.

What else can I do to take care of myself?

You can:

- Get plenty of rest.
 - Drink plenty of fluids.
-

How can I keep from getting pneumonia again?

To avoid germs, wash your hands often with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand rubs.

You can also get certain vaccines to help keep you from getting pneumonia again. Vaccines can prevent certain serious or deadly infections. You should get the flu vaccine every year. Depending on your individual situation, your doctor might also recommend that you get the pneumococcal vaccine. This can help keep you from getting an infection from the kind of bacteria that most commonly causes pneumonia.

If you smoke, quitting smoking is also an important way to help prevent pneumonia. In general, a healthy lifestyle, including eating a healthy diet and getting regular exercise, can also help prevent many problems, including pneumonia.

More on this topic

Patient education: Hospital-acquired pneumonia (The Basics)

Patient education: Pneumonia in adults (The Basics)

Patient education: Pneumonia in children (The Basics)

Patient education: Shortness of breath (The Basics)

Patient education: Flu (The Basics)

Patient education: What you should know about vaccines (The Basics)

Patient education: Pneumonia in adults (Beyond the Basics)

Patient education: Pneumonia prevention in adults (Beyond the Basics)

Patient education: Vaccines for adults (Beyond the Basics)

All topics are updated as new evidence becomes available and our [peer review process](#) is complete.

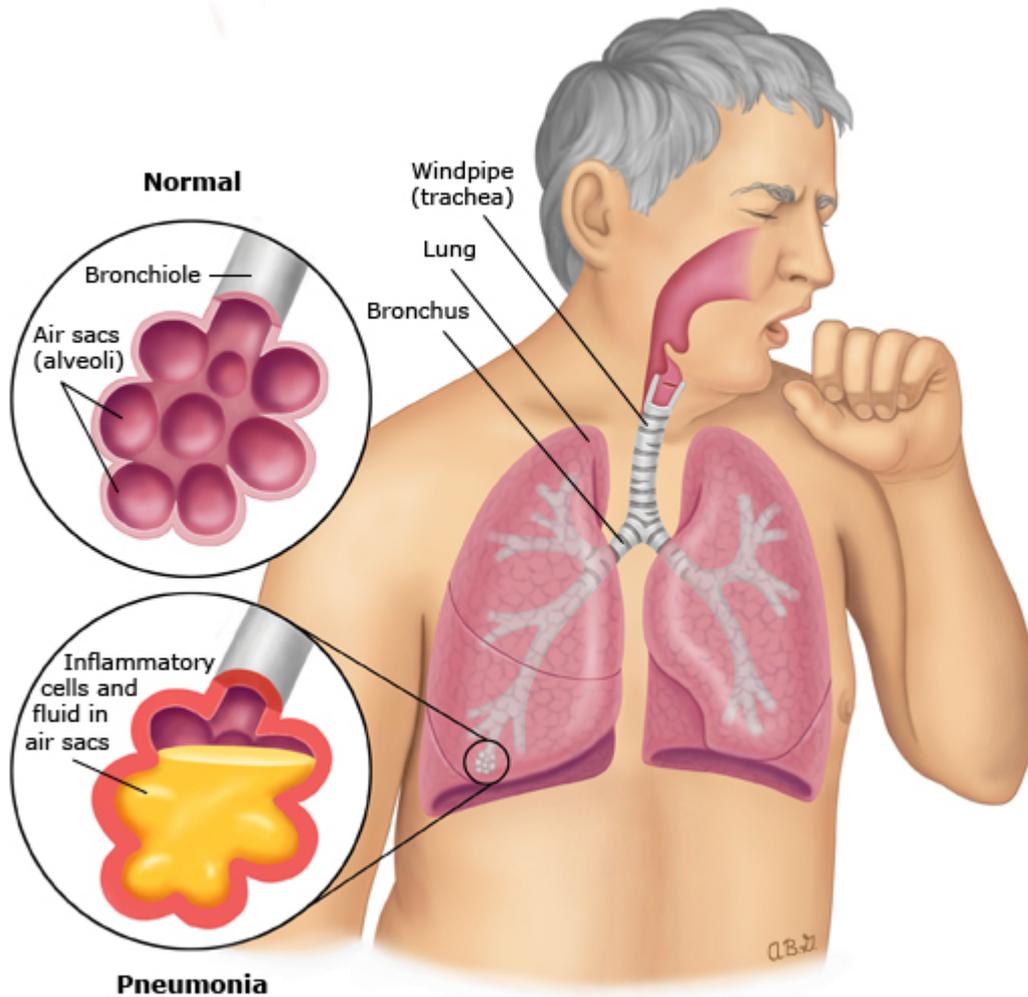
This topic retrieved from UpToDate on: Jan 04, 2025.

Disclaimer: This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at <https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/know/clinical-effectiveness-terms>. 2025© UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates and/or licensors. All rights reserved.

Topic 16993 Version 13.0

GRAPHICS

Pneumonia



Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs. When you have pneumonia, the air sacs in your lungs become inflamed. They can fill with fluid and cells trying to fight the infection. This can make it hard to breathe.

Graphic 55943 Version 9.0

