Bronchitis: causes and effects? [1]

1) Dear Alice,
How do I know I have bronchitis?

2) Dear Alice,
I recently got bronchitis and I was wondering what really causes it. Some friends have told me that it is because I drank a very cold drink when my lungs were "overheated" (like after jogging). Is this one of the causes of bronchitis?

? Doesn't want to drink cold stuff now

Answer

Dear Reader 1 and Doesn't want to drink cold stuff now,

When you have bronchitis, the mucous lining of the bronchi (the airways that connect your trachea to your lungs) becomes inflamed. This inflammation generally causes a persistent, phlegm-producing cough. Other common symptoms of bronchitis are wheezing and breathlessness. People also generally feel congested, may experience some pain or discomfort behind the breastbone (sternum), may have a fever, and may feel fatigued. There are two types of bronchitis: acute and chronic. Neither of these types of bronchitis is caused by drinking cold drinks! The causes may be bacterial or viral, so seeing a health care provider can help you identify if you do in fact have bronchitis and what the appropriate treatment is for you.

Acute bronchitis usually strikes a person suddenly and clears up within a few days (although the cough may last longer). It can often develop from the common cold or another respiratory infection, and they often share symptoms. It seems to be more common among smokers, and others who are more susceptible to respiratory infections (i.e., babies, the elderly, and people with lung disease). On the other hand, chronic bronchitis, as the name implies, is generally defined as bouts of bronchitis that last for three months with multiple recurrences over two years. It, too, is more common among smokers and people who live (or work) in highly polluted areas, and it's considered a form of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

If your cough prevents you from getting sleep, lasts more than three weeks, produces discolored mucus or blood, or comes with shortness of breath, you may want to seek medical attention. Sometimes bacteria, such as those responsible for pneumonia, cause bronchitis. If
necessary, antibiotics may be prescribed. However, since most cases of bronchitis are viral in origin or caused by lung irritants such as smoke and pollutants, antibiotics wouldn't help improve the condition. If you think you have bronchitis, it can be helpful to use some self-care measures at home such as drinking lots of fluids and getting some sleep. You can also try a humidifier to relieve some of the respiratory symptoms. In some cases, medication that treats asthma may be appropriate, particularly if you're wheezing. For a cough that is keeping you from sleeping, you may want to try a cough suppressant medication. However, keep in mind that if you're coughing up mucus, it's beneficial to cough it up rather than hold it in or suppress it with cough medicines as it can help clear the pathway to the lungs. If you smoke, it may be harder for those pathways to heal unless you cut back or quit. In the future, you can also help to prevent transmission of viral or bacterial bronchitis by coughing into the pit of your elbow (rather than your hands) and by washing your hands to stop it from passing to others.

Here's to breathing easier soon!

Alice!

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