

# **MANAGING YOUR BRONCHIECTASIS**

## **What Is Bronchiectasis?**

In the lungs, cartilage and muscle support and keep the shape of the airways. Constant irritation of the structures supporting the airways destroys them, causing the airways to get bigger.

Bronchiectasis is inflammation (swelling) and widening of lung airways.

Bronchiectasis is not contagious.

## **What Causes Bronchiectasis?**

Severe infection with virus or bacteria, blocked airways, and poor clearing of lung secretions are common causes. Smoking, chronic bronchitis, cystic fibrosis, tuberculosis, pneumonia, and lung cancer increase the chance of getting this disease.

## **What Are the Symptoms of Bronchiectasis?**

People have persistent cough with discolored bad-smelling sputum (lung secretions), wheezing, shortness of breath, tiredness, problems sleeping, and weight loss. Often, sputum contains streaks of blood. Fever may be present.

## **How Is Bronchiectasis Diagnosed?**

Your health care provider makes the diagnosis by checking symptoms and ordering tests such as studies of sputum, chest x-rays, lung function tests, and computed tomography (CT). A sputum sample may help tell which organisms are causing the disorder and which antibiotic to use. CT allows the health care provider to look at the size of the airways. Bronchoscopy (a test allowing doctors to look into lungs through a lighted tube) may also help diagnosis and help remove mucus plugs.

## How Is Bronchiectasis Treated?

Treatment may be medical or surgical. Medical treatment involves chest physical therapy, inhalers, and antibiotics. Physical therapy uses changes in posture for better drainage of secretions from lungs. Inhalers allow increased airflow through lungs and help clear secretions. Antibiotics reduce inflammation by killing bacteria that infected the airways.

For severe problems that don't respond to other treatments, surgery to remove affected parts of the lung is an option for certain people.

Some people gain back much lung function, but others such as those with bronchiectasis due to cystic fibrosis may have a disease that gets worse and can lead to death.

## DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Bronchiectasis

- ✓ **DO** make sure that you follow directions for your medicines. They are an important part of helping your lungs work well.
- ✓ **DO** chest physical therapy to allow your lungs to heal faster so you breathe easier. It is often time-consuming but plays an important role.
- ✓ **DO** get pneumococcal pneumonia vaccination and flu shots.
- ✓ **DO** drink lots of water to loosen lung secretions.
- ✓ **DO** exercise regularly and in moderation. Good exercises are walking, running, swimming, aerobics, and dancing. Exercise helps clear lung secretions.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if treatment doesn't help your symptoms.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if your cough or amount of sputum suddenly increases or if you have a fever.

✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you cough up large amounts of blood.

⊗ **DON'T** smoke. Quitting may slow progression of the disease and help symptoms.

FROM THE DESK OF

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following source:

- American Lung Association: Tel: (800) LUNG-USA (586-4872); Website:

<http://www.lungusa.org>

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