



Patient Information

Pneumonia



Causes of pneumonia

Pneumonia is usually caused by a bacterial or viral infection.

You can catch it from someone who has it, or you can sometimes get it if you have another infection such as flu or coronavirus (COVID-19).

It can be caused by a fungal infection, but this is rare in healthy people in the UK.

It may also be caused by something getting into your lungs, such as water or food (aspiration pneumonia).

Treatment for pneumonia

You will usually be given antibiotics to treat pneumonia. Most people get better in 2 to 4 weeks.

Some people are more at risk of becoming seriously ill. You may need to go to hospital for have treatment under the Virtual Ward if:

- you are over 65
- you have cardiovascular disease or a long-term lung condition
- your baby or young child has pneumonia
- you are very unwell

In hospital you will usually be given fluids and antibiotics to treat the infection. You may also be given oxygen to help you breathe.

Recovery

People get better at different rates. It can take between 2 to 12 weeks to recover from pneumonia, sometimes longer. It will depend on whether you have other health conditions and how severe your pneumonia is.

You should start to feel better after 3 to 5 days of treatment with antibiotics. Tiredness and a mild cough can last for up to 4 weeks. If you do not feel that you are getting better at this point, or if your breathing is getting worse, please contact 111 (or if you are under the care of the Virtual Ward, 07355 021559) to discuss your symptoms.

It is important to keep as active as you can whilst also allowing time to rest. Having a good night's sleep and short naps throughout the day will help your body to heal.

Things to look out for during your recovery

Cough: if you have a chesty cough, secretions should become looser as the antibiotics break down the infection and change to a white/clear mucus. If this does not happen within 5 days of finishing your antibiotic course, you are advised to speak with your GP in case you need more antibiotics.

Pain: you may have chest pain due to the inflammation caused by pneumonia, and/or coughing. Please see the tips below for management of this.

Eating and drinking: people with pneumonia often feel less like eating and drinking. Having small, regular meals can help with your recovery and keep your energy levels up. Drinking plenty of clear fluids (water) to keep hydrated is also important. The use of 'build-up' supplements may be helpful as an added source of energy but should not be used as a replacement for meals. If not prescribed whilst in hospital, these can be found in most supermarkets.

You should not drink alcohol whilst unwell or on antibiotics.

Follow up: You may need a chest X-ray 6 weeks after treatment/discharge to make sure you have fully recovered, especially if you're over 50 or if you smoke.

Self-help tips

You are encouraged to try the following tips to aid your recovery where they apply:

Pain relief

- Putting a hot water bottle or a product such as over the counter rub-on pain killers to the affected area (after consulting the pharmacist or GP) can help with the inflammatory pain linked with pneumonia.
- If you are not already, try taking over-the-counter pain relief tablets. If you take any regular medications, please check with the pharmacist that you can take the pain relief with your medicines.

Coughing

- To have a good cough try sitting in a chair, leaning forward, and, if struggling with pain, hugging a pillow to your chest whilst coughing. Avoid over-the-counter cough suppressant medications as you need to encourage coughing to clear any mucus on your chest.
- Steam can help loosen the mucus in your lungs. Take a warm bath or shower, or lean over a bowl of warm water, so you can breathe in the steam.

Breathing exercises

- Take 5 to 10 deep breaths, then cough forcefully 2 to 3 times. This should help push some mucus out of your lungs.
- Take a slow deep breath to fill lungs about 3/4 full. Hold the breath for 2 to 3 seconds. Breathe out forcefully but slowly in a long continuous breath to move mucus from the smaller airways.

Rest

Give your body the rest it needs to fight this infection. As soon as you are able, slowly return to your usual activities, but do not overdo it.

Changes for action

If you experience any of the following new signs or symptoms after completion of your antibiotics you are advised to call NHS 111 unless you are under the care of the Virtual Ward, in which case, please call 07355 021559:

- Increase in breathlessness
- New or worsening chest pain
- Increased production or change in colour or consistency of mucus
- New fever (over 37.8°C)
- New confusion

Pneumonia vaccination

If you are at risk of getting seriously ill with pneumonia, it's recommended you get the pneumococcal vaccine, also known as the pneumonia vaccine. It protects against an infection that can cause pneumonia.

People at high risk include:

- babies
- adults aged over 65
- people with heart, lung, liver, kidney or neurological conditions with a risk of aspiration
- people with diabetes
- people with a weakened immune system, for example, where you have a condition that stops your immune system working properly, or you are having treatment to suppress your immune system

Adults and children more at risk should also get a flu vaccine every year. You can ask a GP or pharmacist about both vaccines.

Smoking

If you're a smoker, now is a good time to give up. Smoking damages your lungs and makes it more likely that you'll get pneumonia again. If you would like to stop, please contact 0800 0130553 or email stopsmoking@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

Acknowledgement: University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust for most of the content to this leaflet.

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