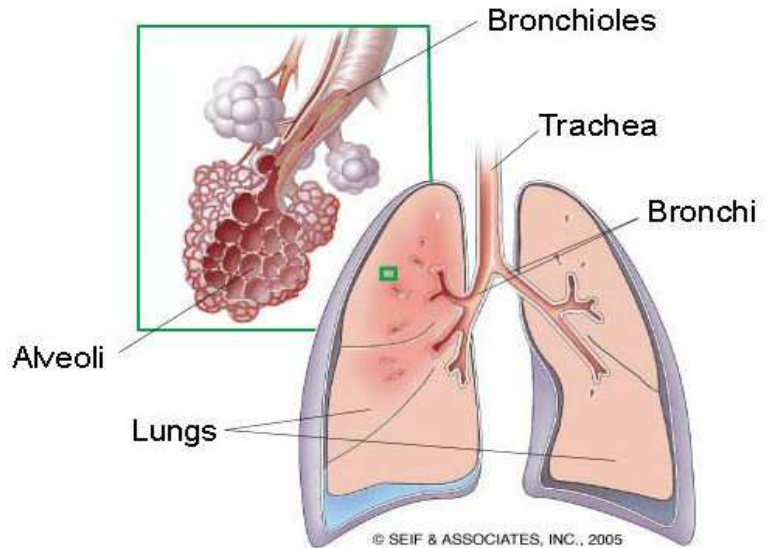


# Bronchitis

You have bronchitis. This is an *inflammation* (soreness) of the bronchi. These are the air passages or tubes that extend from the windpipe into the lungs. This inflammation may be caused by a virus, *bacteria* (germs), dust, allergens, pollutants and many other irritants.

## CAUSES

The cells lining this bronchial tree are covered with tiny hairs (*cilia*). These constantly beat upward away from the lungs towards the mouth to keep the lung free of pollutants which would eventually affect our well being. When these cells become too irritated and unable to do their job, mucous begins to develop and causes the characteristic cough of bronchitis. The cough clears our lungs when our cilia are unable to do their job. Without either of these protective mechanisms, the material would settle in our lungs and we would develop pneumonia. This is why it is necessary to avoid cough suppressants as they take away this protection. Sometimes cough suppressants may be used if you are losing too much rest. Smoking is a common cause of bronchitis and can contribute to pneumonia. Stopping this habit is the single most important thing you can do to help yourself.



## TREATMENT

- Your caregiver may have prescribed an antibiotic if he feels your cough is caused by bacteria. He may also recommend or prescribe an expectorant to loosen the mucous to be coughed up. Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®) may be used for any temperatures or associated aches and pains.
- If bronchitis is allowed to continue without care, it may eventually become *chronic* (a recurrent mucous-producing cough lasting three or more months year after year). If chronic bronchitis is allowed to progress, it may gradually become irreversible. Removal of the offending agent (smoking, for example) will not help as much, if at all. In the early years of this disease, x-rays will appear normal.

## SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- During your treatment you develop more *purulent* (pus-like) sputum.
- You have a fever uncontrolled by medications.
- You become progressively more ill.

**It is necessary to see your caregiver or go to the emergency department immediately.** This is especially true if you are elderly or sick from any other disease.