

# Treating your acute bronchitis and cough



Contact your GP practice or contact NHS by dialling 111 in England (NHS 111) and Scotland (NHS 24) or 0845 4647 in Wales

## How long will the infection last?

The symptoms of acute bronchitis and cough can last up to 21 days

## Antibiotics - the facts

- In adults, there are several causes of cough. This leaflet is intended for patients who have been diagnosed with acute bronchitis and cough only. It is not intended for patients with asthma, COPD or pneumonia
- Most cases of cough and acute bronchitis often get better without antibiotics, as your body can usually fight these infections on its own
- Antibiotics are only likely to reduce the duration of your symptoms by LESS than 1 day
- Antibiotics are only likely to reduce the severity of your symptoms by 10%
- Out of 10 patients taking antibiotics for acute bronchitis and cough, ONLY 1 would benefit from taking them
- If you take antibiotics you are more likely to suffer from a number of side effects such as feeling sick, thrush, diarrhoea and rash and very occasionally severe allergic reactions
- The more we use antibiotics, the greater the chance that bacteria will become resistant to them. This means antibiotics no longer work on serious infections: this makes you and your family at greater risk in the future.

## How to treat and ease your symptoms

- Have plenty of rest
- Drink enough fluids to avoid feeling thirsty
- There is little evidence that cough medicines work. As an alternative to an over-the-counter cough medicine, try making your own mixture of honey and lemon, which can help ease your cough
- Fever (having a temperature) is a sign the body is fighting the infection and usually gets better by itself in most cases. You can use paracetamol regularly in full doses if you are uncomfortable as a result of fever. Ibuprofen may also be used (e.g. to help get to sleep) but avoid ibuprofen regularly as it may interfere with the body's ability to fight off the infection
- Ask your local pharmacist to recommend medicines to help your symptoms or pain (or both).

*If you have asthma, please follow your asthma treatment plan or seek medical advice.*

## When you should get help

1. If you have difficulty breathing. Signs can include:
  - breathing quickly
  - turning blue around the lips and the skin below the mouth
  - skin between or above the ribs getting sucked or pulled in with every breath
2. If you develop a severe headache and are sick
3. If your skin is very cold or has a strange colour, or you develop an unusual rash
4. If you feel confused or have slurred speech or are very drowsy
5. If you develop chest pain
6. If you have difficulty swallowing or are drooling
7. If you cough up blood
8. If you are feeling a lot worse.

### **Less serious signs that can usually wait until the next available GP appointment:**

If your symptoms are not improving after 21 days.