



ADVICE AND FACTS ABOUT ANTIBIOTICS AND INFECTIONS

Are you suffering from a chest cold?

Bronchitis, also known as chest cold, is an inflammation of the main passages of the lungs. The mucus membranes in the airways from the throat to the lungs swell and become irritated. Coughing, the most common symptom, lasts for an average of three weeks. You may also have a fever, sore throat and runny nose.

Bronchitis is usually caused by a virus or occasionally by bacteria and it normally goes away on its own. Although annoying at times, coughing is the body's way of protecting the lungs. By coughing, the body gets rid of phlegm that would otherwise collect in lung tissue and cause more serious problems. Phlegm and expectoration also serve as a barrier that captures inhaled dust, bacteria and viruses. Because coughing is a protective mechanism, it will probably be the last symptom to go away before you fully recover. The irritation of the airways heals slowly, and this is also a reason for the prolonged period of coughing.

Antibiotic therapy

If you have healthy lungs, bronchitis does not require antibiotic therapy. Even if your illness is due to a common type of bacteria or mycoplasma, antibiotics won't speed up your recovery despite the fact that antibiotics are intended to fight bacteria rather than viruses.

Taking antibiotics when they aren't needed is a bad idea since they also affect the "good" bacteria in your body. Antibiotics can also have side effects, such as diarrhoea and skin rash. The use of antibiotics can also lead to bacterial resistance, which means that antibiotics won't have any effect when needed to fight serious infections.

However, antibiotics are sometimes necessary to treat your bronchitis if you already have another lung disease, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, COPD.

Advice

- Pain relievers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen can alleviate fever and chest pain
- Cough medicines rarely have any effect when it comes to bronchitis
- Smoking makes the symptoms worse and increases the risk of recurrent difficulties

What to watch for

It usually takes two to three weeks before you fully recover from bronchitis. If you feel well except for a cough, you have no need to worry, particularly if you notice a gradual recovery.

If you develop new or more severe symptoms, or if you start to cough up blood or having difficulty breathing, contact your community health centre again. If the cough doesn't go away in 4 to 5 weeks, or if you have a recurring lingering cough several times a year, contact the health centre for a lung examination.