

Chest infections



When you get a cold or the flu, developing a cough is common, especially when the infection progresses without treatment. A chest infection as a result can be mild and easily treated, but sometimes, it can be more serious or even life-threatening.

Do you have a chest infection?

One of the first questions to ask when you develop a bad cough is whether you have an accompanying chest infection. The symptoms include:

- A cough that doesn't ease up.
- Coughing up blood or thick phlegm or mucus.
- Shallow breathing and the inability to take in deep breaths.
- A wheezing sound when breathing in or out.
- A fever.
- A rapid heart rate.
- Pain or tightness in the chest, particularly when breathing.
- Dizziness, confusion, or feeling disorientated.

Other signs that may be combined with the above are general signs that your body is fighting an infection, which include:

- A headache.
- Fatigue.
- Sweating or shivering.
- Loss of appetite.
- Joint or muscle pain.

What causes a chest infection?

The majority of respiratory tract infections (RTI) are caused by viruses. The most common one is the virus that leads to bronchitis.

Many patients are given antibiotics to treat these RTIs, which don't help because an antibiotic is a treatment for bacterial infections, not viral ones.

When the RTI is as a result of pneumonia, which is less common, antibiotics are the preferred method of treatment as this infection is caused by a type of bacteria. Pneumonia is usually a more serious infection.

Are you at risk?

Anyone can get a chest infection, but they are more common in:

- Babies, children, and the elderly.
- Those who smoke.
- Women who are pregnant.
- Those with other respiratory disorders like asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or cystic fibrosis.
- People with other chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, or liver disease.
- Those with weakened immune systems like is the case in some types of cancers and AIDS.
- Those who are being treated with high-dose immune suppressants like chemotherapy or cortisone (steroids).

If you're struggling with a chest infection that won't go away, speak to your doctor about your options.