

PLEURISY

(Pleuritis; Pleurodynia)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Inflammation and irritation of the pleura. The pleura is a thin, two-layered membrane that lines the lung and chest cavity. Pleurisy is not a disease, but may be a symptom of many different disorders. Fluid (pleural effusion) may develop at the site of inflammation, between the two membrane layers. This is called wet pleurisy. If there is no fluid build up, it is dry pleurisy.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Sudden chest pain that worsens with breathing and coughing. The pain varies from vague discomfort that occurs only with deep breathing or coughing to intense, stabbing pain. Pain is usually over the area of pleural inflammation, but it may also occur in the lower chest or abdomen.
- Fever (sometimes).
- Discomfort on moving the affected side.
- Rapid, shallow breathing.
- Breathing difficulty if pleural effusion develops.

CAUSES

Pleurisy can be caused by infection (e.g., bacterial, fungal, or viral), injury, irritation, blood clot, or disease. Sometimes, no cause is found.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Lung or chest infection (e.g., pneumonia, bronchitis, tuberculosis).
- Blood clot in the lung.
- Injury to the chest or rib fracture.
- Cancer in other parts of the body.
- Collagen vascular disease, such as systemic lupus erythematosus or rheumatoid arthritis.
- Collapse of a part of the lung.
- Kidney, liver, or pancreas disorders.
- Weak immune system due to illness or drugs.
- Smoking.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

No specific preventive measures. Obtain medical treatment for any causes listed above to reduce the risk of pleurisy.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Outcome depends on successful treatment of the disorder causing it. Sometimes, pleurisy symptoms clear completely on their own in 1 to 2 weeks.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Fluid build up (pleural effusion).
- Pneumonia.
- Scar tissue (adhesions) may form that cause pain and shortness of breath.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask about your symptoms and activities. Medical tests may include blood and pleural fluid studies, x-rays of the chest, and others to diagnose the cause.
- The main treatment is aimed at the underlying cause. Other treatment may help the symptoms of pleurisy.
- For chest pain, wrap the entire chest with two or three nonadhesive, 6-inch-wide elastic bandages.
- Lie with the sore side down, on a firm surface. This will help ease the pain.
- Quit smoking. Find a way to stop that works for you.
- Holding a pillow firmly against the chest wall helps ease the pain when coughing.
- Excess fluid in the pleura may need to be removed. This is done with a needle inserted into the pleura to draw out the fluid.

MEDICATIONS

- You may take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as aspirin (if over age 18) or ibuprofen, to relieve pain and inflammation.
- Antibiotics, bronchodilators, or stronger pain relievers may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

Reduce activity until pain and cough get better. Then resume normal activities gradually.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of pleurisy.
- The following occur during treatment:
 - Fever.
 - Increased pain.
 - Increased breathlessness.
 - Cough that is dry and non-productive.
 - Blue or dark fingernails, toenails, or lips.
 - Blood in the sputum.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page