

BRONCHIECTASIS

- Bronchiectasis is a condition in which the airways within the lungs (bronchial tubes) become damaged and widened (a bit like varicose veins except affecting the airways rather than veins).
- Due to widening and damage to these airways, mucus is not cleared from the lungs as effectively as normal, and therefore mucus tends to build up in the lungs
- This collection of mucus within the airways increases the chance of developing infection in the bronchial tubes

What causes bronchiectasis?

- In most cases, bronchiectasis results from severe lung infection in childhood (eg. measles or whooping cough) which results in damage to the airways
- Occasionally bronchiectasis can result from problems with the immune system, or with inherited conditions

What does it mean for my health?

- Most people with bronchiectasis lead normal, full lives
- Cough with mucus or phlegm is the most common symptom
- Flare-ups with increased lung infection may occur from time to time

Can it be cured?

- For most people there is no cure
- However for most people treatment is simple, and whilst the cough is a nuisance it is not life-threatening.

What is the treatment?

- The key to managing bronchiectasis is minimising the amount of 'sputum' (phlegm or mucus) within the airways to prevent lung infection and 'flares'
 - the simplest and most effective ways to do this are with chest physiotherapy techniques (e.g. postural drainage, active cycle of breathing, 'huffing' and 'PEP' mask physio) and regular physical activity
- a regular exercise programme is vital for people with ANY lung disease, including bronchiectasis – there are **extra** benefits in bronchiectasis, because exercise will also help clear any 'sputum' from the lungs, acting as a form of very effective chest physiotherapy
- Asthma-type inhalers are often also useful for symptoms of bronchiectasis
 - 'reliever' medications may help clearance of sputum from the lungs, and improve breathlessness
 - 'preventer' inhalers may improve breathlessness and reduce infective 'flares'
- Inhaled antibiotics may sometimes also be useful
- Antibiotic treatment with either tablets, or occasionally with intravenous antibiotics in hospital, will be necessary from time to time to treat 'flares'

When should I take antibiotics?

- You should develop an **emergency plan** with your doctor to deal with flare-ups
- Antibiotics may be useful if any two of the following occur:
 1. increased amount of mucus
 2. deeper colour of mucus (yellow, green or brown)
 3. fever or breathlessness

What else is useful?

- Patients with lung conditions including bronchiectasis should receive vaccination for:
 1. Influenza - a 'flu shot is necessary every year
 2. 'Pneumococcal' pneumonia – you should have the pneumonia vaccine every 5 years

Web information

- A useful web page to begin browsing is :
<http://www.projectlinks.org/bronchiectasis/>
- The Australian Lung Foundation has useful information at:
http://www.nevdgp.org.au/geninf/lung_f/bronchiectasis-health.html

To stay healthy:
keep your lungs clear
get regular exercise
know your emergency plan
have your 'flu shot every year