

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT BRONCHIECTASIS

What is bronchiectasis?

Bronchiectasis is a long-term chest condition, in which extra mucus collects in damaged airways. The lungs are more likely to become infected. Repeated infections gradually cause more damage.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms vary from person to person but can include:

- Frequent chest infections
- A chesty cough that won't go away
- Feeling out of breath
- Feeling tired

What causes bronchiectasis?

The most common cause is a bad chest infection, usually in childhood or as a young adult, which causes damage to the airways. In up to half of all people with bronchiectasis the cause is not known.

How is bronchiectasis diagnosed?

It can take a while to get a formal diagnosis. Your GP will refer you to a specialist chest doctor for more investigations if he or she thinks you might have bronchiectasis.

How is it treated?

- **Antibiotics** are used to treat chest infections.
- **Airway clearance exercises** will help you clear the mucus from your chest.
- **Pulmonary rehabilitation** (rehab) can help you manage your symptoms.
- **Inhalers** are sometimes recommended to relieve breathlessness.

What can I do to help myself?

Keep your airways as clear as you can

A physiotherapist can teach you the best way to clear mucus from your chest. Ask your GP if you find it difficult to clear your chest and you haven't seen a physiotherapist.

Stay active

This will help to keep your lungs clear and improve your breathing. There are many ways to stay active, such as walking, housework, gardening or dancing.

Learn to control your breathing

This can help to reduce feelings of anxiety and can help you to feel in control of your bronchiectasis. Ask your GP or physiotherapist about breathing control.

FACTSHEET

Pace yourself

Bronchiectasis can make you feel very tired. Try to pace yourself, break big tasks down into smaller ones, give yourself plenty of time to do things, and plan time to rest.

Make sure you are using your inhaler correctly

Ask your practice nurse, GP or pharmacist to check how you use your inhaler.

Monitor your symptoms and know when to get help

Know what is normal for you and tell. Tell your GP or nurse about any sudden changes in your symptoms as soon as you can. For example:

- Increased coughing, more difficult to clear chest
- More, darker, or thicker sputum than usual
- Fever or chills
- Feeling more tired than usual
- More short of breath than usual

Early treatment with antibiotics can prevent you going into hospital.

Reduce your risk of chest infections

- Keep up to date with your vaccinations.
- Eat a healthy diet and drink plenty of fluids.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Throw away any used tissues.
- Try to avoid being with people who are unwell with a cold, flu or chest infection.

Stop smoking

Smoking increases the damage to your lungs and will make your symptoms worse. Contact Smokeline free on 0800 84 84 84 (8am-10pm) or go to www.canstopsmoking.com for help to stop smoking.

Talk to people

It can be helpful to hear how other people with similar lung problems cope. It can also be helpful for your family and friends to know more about what is happening to you.

Ask the CHSS Advice Line nurses for more information about local support groups.



For more information about bronchiectasis see the CHSS booklet *Living with bronchiectasis*.

Other CHSS factsheets that might be useful include *Coping with tiredness*, *Healthy eating*, *How to manage your breathlessness*, *Just move*, *Pulmonary rehabilitation* and *Stopping smoking*.

**If you would like to speak to one of our nurses in confidence,
please call the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line nurses**

0808 801 0899

free to call from landlines and mobiles.