

**Patient  
Information**

# Pneumonia

## Introduction

Following your assessment, you have been diagnosed with pneumonia. This leaflet contains information about pneumonia and what you can expect.

## What is pneumonia?

Your lungs are breathing tubes. At the end of these tubes, there are tiny air sacs called alveoli. When you have pneumonia, it means that you have infection in your lungs and these alveoli have filled with fluid. There are many different types of bacteria and viruses that can cause the infection in the lungs. These infections are carried in the air particularly when people are coughing, sneezing or vomiting. This infection makes it harder for your lungs to process the air as you breathe.

## Who is at risk from pneumonia?

Pneumonia is a condition that can affect people of any age. It is common during the autumn and winter. You are more at risk of getting pneumonia if you:

- smoke
- have long term heart, lung or kidney disease
- have medical conditions needing several treatments
- are taking medicines which weaken your immune system
- have cancer or you are being treated with chemotherapy
- have had a recent chest injury

Babies, young children and the elderly are most at risk along with high use of drugs and alcohol.

## How is pneumonia identified?

To identify whether you have pneumonia, you will be asked to describe your symptoms. You will also have blood pressure, temperature and pulse recorded. Some people may have blood tests and a chest X-ray to help decide which treatment is needed. Other patients may only have their chest examined.

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## What to expect next

After discussion with you, a decision will be made about which treatment is best. A course of antibiotics will normally be successful in treating your pneumonia.

Usually we can effectively treat your illness at home with oral antibiotics (tablets, capsules or liquid taken by mouth).

Sometimes, these antibiotics may not be strong enough and we may need to give you intravenous antibiotics (where an antibiotic is injected into your vein via a drip). Where possible this can be done in your home.

When you have had pneumonia, it may take a few weeks or months to feel fully fit again. Your symptoms should steadily improve and most people can expect that by:

- 1 week - your fever should have gone
- 4 weeks - you should have less chest pain and produce less sputum
- 6 weeks - you may notice that you have less of a cough and your breathlessness should have improved
- 3 months - most symptoms should have gone, but you may still feel tired
- 6 months - most people will feel that they are back to normal

You may require a follow-up chest X-ray. Please contact your GP 6 to 8 weeks after you started your treatment.

## How can you improve your condition?

Have lots of rest and drink plenty of water.

If you are a smoker you are strongly advised to stop. We are able to give you information about the local stop smoking services available.

Make sure that you eat a healthy and well balanced diet to give your body the nutrients it needs to fight an infection.

Try to avoid the spread of illnesses by using strict hand washing and hygiene habits.

Talk to your GP or nurse about having the pneumonia vaccination and the flu vaccination.

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## When to seek help

If you have any of the symptoms listed below you should contact NHS 111 for advice:

- Your breathing becomes very fast
- You feel more unwell
- Your symptoms get worse very quickly
- You have blood in your sputum when you cough
- If you feeling increasingly confused or disorientated
- You have worsening or persistent chest pain

In an emergency contact the Emergency Services by dialling 999.

## Further information

Further information about pneumonia can be found on the British Lung Foundation website:

[www.blf.org.uk/Page/Pneumonia](http://www.blf.org.uk/Page/Pneumonia)

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