



# ASBESTOSIS



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Inflammation of the lungs due to breathing asbestos particles. It is a chronic disorder, but is not contagious. Men over age 40 who have been exposed to asbestos are more likely to be affected.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Shortness of breath.
- Cough that produces little or no sputum.
- General ill feeling.
- Fitful sleep.
- Appetite loss and weight loss.
- Chest pain.
- Hoarseness.
- Coughing up blood.
- Bluish nails.

### CAUSES

Long-term exposure to small particles of asbestos at work or from other sources. The outer part of the lung becomes irritated by the asbestos fibers. This leads to inflammation and to a thickening and scarring of the lung tissue (pulmonary fibrosis). It may take up to 20 years or more between exposure to asbestos and the symptoms of the disease. This period may be shorter after intense exposure.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Work that involves asbestos.
- Smoking.
- Excess alcohol use.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Follow recommended industrial safety procedures to suppress asbestos dust.
- For workers in asbestos industries, regularly scheduled x-rays to detect any shadow on the lungs. If so, the person should stop working with asbestos, even if there are no symptoms.
- Don't smoke.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

There is no cure. In a few patients, it may remain unchanged, but in most, it is slowly progressive (even without further exposure to asbestos). Symptoms can usually be

relieved or controlled.

## POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
- Heart failure due to lung disease.
- It may lead to cancer of the lungs (greatly increased in cigarette smokers).
- Tuberculosis.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask about your symptoms and past exposure to asbestos. Medical tests usually include a CT scan or x-rays of the lungs and lung function test. A bronchoscopy may be done (an instrument with a lighted tip is used to view inside the lungs and remove tissue for a biopsy).
- There is no specific treatment for asbestosis. Treatment can help relieve the symptoms and prevent complications.
- Avoid any further contact with asbestos.
- Stop smoking. Find a way to quit that works for you.
- Obtain medical care for any respiratory infection, including the common cold.
- Chest physical therapy techniques will be provided by a respiratory therapist.
- Learn and practice bronchial drainage.
- Use a cool-mist humidifier (if advised) to loosen bronchial secretions so they can be coughed up easily.
- Keep flu and pneumococcal vaccines up-to-date.
- Supplemental oxygen may be required.
- Avoid crowds and persons with infections.
- To learn more: American Lung Association, 61 Broadway, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10006; (800) 586-4872; website: [www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org).

### MEDICATIONS

- Bronchodilators (inhaled or oral) will help open up the bronchial tubes and allow passage of air. This is supervised at first by an inhalation therapist.
- For minor discomfort, use nonprescription drugs, such as acetaminophen or aspirin.

### ACTIVITY

Regular exercise in whatever forms possible is important to preserve lung capacity.

### DIET

No special diet.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of asbestosis.
- New symptoms develop or other symptoms get worse, despite treatment.

