

Pneumonia

Information for patients



Introduction

You have been admitted to hospital for treatment of pneumonia. This leaflet will give you information so that you understand a bit more about the illness and know what to expect during your stay.

What is pneumonia?

Pneumonia is an inflammation of the lung tissue, usually as a result of an infection. How severe your symptoms are will depend upon a number of factors.

Some people with pneumonia can be treated and cared for in their own homes with antibiotic tablets, but if you have a more severe case of pneumonia you may need a stay in hospital with intravenous antibiotics (given through a drip).

How do you get pneumonia?

You may have breathed in some bacteria, viruses, or other germs. If you are normally healthy, a small number of germs usually do not matter. They will be trapped in your sputum (phlegm) and killed by your immune system.

Sometimes, however, germs can multiply and cause lung infections. This is more likely to happen if you are already in poor health, if you are frail or elderly, if you have a chest disease or if you have a low immunity to infection. If you are aware you have a low immunity then it is advisable to speak to your health care practitioners about what might be done to prevent you getting pneumonia again in the future. However, even healthy people can develop pneumonia.

What are the symptoms?

Typical symptoms of pneumonia are:

- a cough
- a fever (high temperature)
- sweating
- shivering
- being off your food
- feeling generally unwell.

Headaches and aches and pains are also common. You usually produce more sputum. This may become yellow or green coloured and is sometimes blood stained.

You may become breathless, breathe more quickly and develop a tight chest.

You may develop a sharp pain in the side of your chest if the infection also affects the membrane between your lung and chest wall (the pleura).

How is pneumonia diagnosed?

Pneumonia is usually diagnosed by a doctor listening to your chest with a stethoscope. The doctor may hear crackles in your chest, which is a sign of pneumonia.

Part of your assessment in hospital is the taking of a chest X-ray and blood samples. These will help confirm the diagnosis and how severe the pneumonia infection is.

Treatment – what can I expect?

In hospital

If your doctor feels that you have severe symptoms you may need to stay in hospital to be treated. We will need to give you antibiotics either as tablets or through a tube inserted in to a vein (cannula). If your oxygen levels are low you may also be given oxygen through a mask or very small tubes that sit just inside your nostrils.

You will be seen by a hospital doctor regularly. They will make an on-going assessment of your recovery. This may involve daily blood tests and measurement of your fluid intake and output.

You will also frequently have your temperature and blood pressure taken by the nurse.

In the early stages you may need help with going to the toilet, washing and other personal activities. However, mobility (moving around) and exercise are important parts of your treatment and recovery and you will need to start to do this as soon as possible. We will help you to sit out of bed in a chair and walk short distances, or as far as you could before your illness. Moving around will help your lungs to expand fully; this will help you to recover.

It is important that you feel as comfortable as possible when sitting. Staff will help you with this if needed.

You may also be seen by a physiotherapist. They can help you with coughing techniques to make coughing less painful and more productive.

You may be asked to walk or complete exercises with the physiotherapist even if you are on oxygen. We encourage you to keep moving around as this will help keep up your level of fitness. It also helps to prevent complications that can arise from spending long periods of time in bed, such as pressure ulcers and blood clots in your veins.

Smoking increases the risk of developing pneumonia as it damages your lungs. If you smoke, the hospital staff will talk to you about stopping and will provide you with information on where to get free support.

At home

If the pneumonia is relatively mild and you are otherwise well, you can return home to recover. You will be prescribed antibiotics. It is important that you drink plenty of fluids to avoid becoming dehydrated.

You can take paracetamol to ease most pain and help to lower a fever. If you develop severe pain please seek advice from your GP.

When you return home, even though the infection is being treated, you may still feel tired and unwell for some time. It is important to gradually return to your everyday activities and not rush to do everything as soon as you return home. You should gradually increase the distance you walk over the first few weeks, to slowly increase your fitness levels. It may take several weeks or months before you feel fully fit again.

What if I get pneumonia again?

If you get pneumonia more than once, you may need to have more investigations to understand why this is happening. This could be due to an underlying problem in your chest or your immune system and you may be referred to a specialist chest doctor.

What can I do to avoid getting pneumonia again?

Keeping a healthy lifestyle is the best way to avoid getting pneumonia. This includes exercise where possible, a healthy diet and avoiding smoking or excessive alcohol.

Smoking damages your lungs, which means they become infected more easily. If you smoke, the best thing you can do to prevent pneumonia is to stop smoking.

To help you stop smoking, the NHS Smoking Helpline offers advice and support.

Tel: **0300 123 1044**

For more information, visit the NHS Smokefree website:

<http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree>

Your GP or pharmacist can also give you help and advice about stopping smoking.

If your hospital doctor or GP thinks you are at high risk of getting pneumonia again, they may recommend that you have a vaccination against pneumonia. They may also suggest that you have the 'flu jab each year.

Acknowledgment and thanks to Sunderland Royal Hospital for the information taken from their Thoracic Medicine Patient Information Leaflet.

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

Authors: Ali Northover, Clinical Governance Manager, Patient Safety
June 2014

Review: June 2017

Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust

Oxford OX3 9DU

www.ouh.nhs.uk/patient-guide/leaflets/library.aspx

