

# WHAT IS BRONCHIECTASIS?



## Could You Have Bronchiectasis?

Symptoms may not start until months or years after frequent lung infections. Common symptoms include:

- Coughing up large amounts of mucus and pus
- Frequent colds
- Shortness of breath and wheezing
- Chest pain
- Thickening of the skin under curved fingernails and toenails, known as clubbing

Serious symptoms, such as coughing up blood, sweating at night, and feeling tired, may develop over time. Children may experience weight loss or not grow at a normal rate.

To diagnose bronchiectasis, your doctor will examine you, listen to your lungs, and ask about your health history. They will order tests to find any underlying causes, rule out other causes of your symptoms, and determine how damaged your airways have become. These may include imaging tests, like a chest X-ray or computed tomography (CT) scan, to check for lung damage; and blood tests or phlegm tests to see if you have an infection. They may run tests to measure how well your lungs move air in and out, do genetic testing, or perform a specific test for cystic fibrosis.

Learn the facts about bronchiectasis, its signs and symptoms, and ways to manage the condition after a diagnosis.

## Basic Facts About Bronchiectasis



**Bronchiectasis is a lung condition that causes the airways to widen and scar.** This happens when an infection, inflammatory disorder, or another condition damages the walls of the airways, making it difficult for the airways to clear out mucus.



Some people are born with bronchiectasis. **More often, bronchiectasis happens to people who have certain conditions that injure the lungs.** In the U.S., cystic fibrosis is the most common cause of bronchiectasis.



**Overall, bronchiectasis is most common in women. However, in children, it is more common in boys.**



National Heart, Lung,  
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### Managing Bronchiectasis

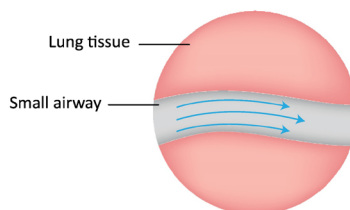
There is no cure for bronchiectasis. However, most people live a normal life by following their healthcare provider's advice and taking medications. Early diagnosis and treatment are important to prevent further lung damage.

Treatment aims to control lung infections, mucus, and underlying conditions. Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics to treat lung infections or medications to help you cough up mucus more easily. Hydration and chest physical therapy can also help relieve mucus buildup in the lungs. In some cases, your doctor may recommend surgery.

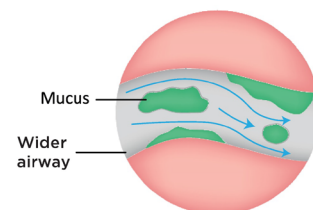
If you have bronchiectasis, try to follow a healthy lifestyle. Quit smoking, eat healthy foods, and get regular exercise. It is also important to stay up to date with flu, COVID-19, and pneumonia vaccinations to avoid lung infections.

### How Bronchiectasis Affects Breathing

When the airways are damaged and wider than usual, it is harder for the lungs to get rid of mucus. The airways normally make mucus to help remove particles that can get in the lungs, but when mucus builds up, bacteria can grow and cause frequent lung infections. Trapped mucus also makes it harder for air to get in and out of the lungs, making breathing more difficult. The severity of bronchiectasis symptoms depends on how much damage has occurred in the lungs. Bronchiectasis can affect just one section of one lung, or many sections of both lungs.



Healthy airway



Airway with bronchiectasis



Healthy lung

Lung with bronchiectasis

For more information about bronchiectasis, visit [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/bronchiectasis](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/bronchiectasis)  
For more information about lung health, visit [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/BreatheBetter](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/BreatheBetter)