

Pneumonia: A guide to hospital care

What is pneumonia?

Pneumonia [noo-mohn-yuh] is an infection of the lungs. The infection causes the small air sacs in your lungs to fill up with fluid or pus. This makes it harder for you to breathe, and usually causes coughing and other symptoms that reduce your energy and appetite.

Pneumonia can be serious. About 1 in every 5 people with pneumonia needs to be in the hospital. Fortunately, with good hospital care when needed, most patients with pneumonia make a full recovery.

How serious is pneumonia?

Pneumonia can be serious. About 1 out of every 5 people with pneumonia needs to be in the hospital. Pneumonia is most serious in these people:

- Young children (ages 2 years and younger)
- Older adults (ages 65 and older)
- People with chronic illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease
- People with lung diseases such as asthma, cystic fibrosis, or emphysema
- People with weakened immune systems
- Smokers and heavy drinkers

Why do I need to be in the hospital?

In the hospital, your healthcare providers can monitor your breathing to make sure you're getting enough oxygen. They can give you medicines that will help you fight the infection faster, and closely watch other signs such as your heart rate, temperature, and eating, to see if you're getting better.

What do I need to do next?

- 1 Work with your healthcare providers** while you're in the hospital. You'll recover fastest if you and your healthcare providers work together.
- 2 Learn from your healthcare providers.** They'll help you with:
 - How to breathe deeply to help clear your lungs.
 - What you can do to prevent blood clots.
 - Learning more about pneumonia.
 - Information about quitting smoking, if you or someone in your household smokes.
 - Things you need to know or do when you go home.
- 3 Speak up!** Don't worry about being a bother. Ask:
 - How you're doing, and how much longer they think you'll need to stay in the hospital.
 - Any questions or concerns you have about your care, your treatment, or going home.

How long will I need to be in the hospital?

Most people are well enough to leave the hospital within about 3 days. Many factors contribute to your treatment plan, however. Some people can go home earlier, and some need to stay longer. Talk with your healthcare providers about how long you need to stay.

In the hospital...

Day	Tests and Treatments	Medicines	Diet and Activity
Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may receive a chest X-ray, have blood drawn, and be asked to spit into a cup. Healthcare providers will listen to your breathing, and check your heart rate, blood pressure, and how much oxygen your lungs are getting. • Based on your condition, you will be given treatments, such as a breathing treatment or extra oxygen. You may be given immunizations for influenza (the flu) and for pneumonia. The pneumonia vaccine may help protect you from getting pneumonia again. 	<p>Your medicines may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antibiotics to control the infection in your lungs. These are usually given through an IV (intravenous) line. • Medicine to help prevent blood clots while you're lying in bed. • Medicine to manage fever or pain. Be sure to tell your healthcare providers if your medicine is not controlling your pain. • Any medicines you take at home. Your nurse will ask for a list of all the medicines you were taking at home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's important to drink plenty of fluids and eat as much as you can. You need the nutrition to help you get better. Ask your doctor if there are any foods you should avoid. • Resting is important, but you still need to move. Increase your activity as soon as you are able. Your nurse may have you sit in a chair for 20 minutes during a meal, or walk to the bathroom.
Day 2	<p>Your blood pressure, heart rate, and oxygen level will all be checked frequently to see if there are any changes in your condition. Unfortunately, this may happen even at night, but care providers will try to disrupt your sleep as little as possible. If you are receiving oxygen, the oxygen level will be reduced as your condition improves.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will continue to receive an antibiotic and medicines to reduce fever and pain. Discuss your pain goal with your nurse and ask for it to be written on the board in your room. • You may also continue to take medicine to prevent you from developing a blood clot. Once you're able to walk more, the blood clot medicine will be stopped. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to eat at least half of the food that's brought to you. If you feel sick to your stomach (nauseated), ask your nurse if you can have medicine to treat it. If there's a food you think you'd like to eat, let your nurse know. • You will be asked to get as much activity as possible without tiring yourself out. You may be asked to walk down the hall while your oxygen is monitored. This will help your doctor determine if you will need oxygen at home.
Day 3 and after	<p>If you have been receiving extra oxygen, the goal on Day 3 will be to improve enough that you don't need it anymore. If you still need oxygen, your doctor may order it for home use. You may also have blood drawn so the doctor can tell how you are responding to treatment. And, you may be allowed to go home!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your doctor may change your IV antibiotic to an oral one. Being able to take medicines by mouth is a step toward going home. Your nurse will teach you about the antibiotic pill. • You may also still need medicine to manage fever or pain. Discuss your pain goal with your nurse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your healthcare providers will encourage you to increase your activity. The goal is for you to slowly gain your strength back by increasing your activity level each time you walk. • You may still get tired easily so remember not to push yourself too hard and get lots of rest when you need to.

After the hospital...

What can I expect when I go home?

Even though you're well enough to go home, you may still need some time to completely recover. Here are some things you can expect:

- **Your cough and fatigue should improve**, but may last up to a few weeks.
- **You'll need extra rest.** You may need a little help from family or friends when you first go home. Try to increase your activity every day, but don't push too hard.
- **Your doctor will prescribe an antibiotic** for you to continue at home. It is important that you take the antibiotic as prescribed until it is all gone.

When should I call my doctor?

Once you get home, follow your doctor's instructions and pay attention to your symptoms. Call your doctor or go to the emergency room if you notice that:

- **Your cough is worse or you cough up blood** or rust-colored mucus.
- **Your breathing is more difficult** — for example it's faster, more shallow, or more painful than before.
- **You become lightheaded or very weak.**
- **You develop a fever higher than 102° F** or you have shaking chills.
- **You have nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.**
- **You have increased pain.**
- **You develop a serious side effect** to your medicine — such as vomiting, frequent diarrhea, or a bad rash.

How can I prevent pneumonia in the future?

You know how serious pneumonia can be. Here are some things you can do to avoid getting pneumonia again:

- **Get all vaccines** recommended by your doctor. The flu vaccine is recommended for everyone over the age of 6 months. A pneumonia vaccine is recommended for people who have already had pneumonia and others at a high risk of getting it. Ask for Intermountain Healthcare's *Pneumococcal Vaccines* fact sheet for more information.
- **Stay away from smoke and bad air.**
 - If you smoke, now is the best time to stop. Smoking damages your lungs' ability to fight germs and doubles the risk that you'll get pneumonia again.
 - Stay away from other people's cigarette smoke, too.
 - Wear a mask when cleaning or working in dusty or moldy places.
 - Avoid spending too much time outdoors on a "bad air" day.
- **Keep your immune system strong.** Get plenty of rest and physical activity, and eat a healthy diet (with lots of fruits and vegetables).
- **Wash your hands often** — especially after being around someone who is coughing and sneezing.



Where can I learn more?

Ask about these fact sheets:



