Bacterial pneumonia is an infection causing swelling and fluid in the lungs. This fluid may make it hard for you to breathe. Some people get bacterial pneumonia when their body is weak from another illness, such as a cold or the flu. Some get infected by breathing in the germs (bacteria) or by touching another person who has them. Symptoms of bacterial pneumonia can range from mild to severe (very bad). Most people with pneumonia can recover at home. Treatments may include medicines, using a humidifier or vaporizer, and getting plenty of rest.

**Your appointments and medications**

Keep all follow-up appointments with your health care provider. Write down any questions you have, so you’ll remember them during your next visit.

Keep a written list of the medicines you take, the amounts, and when and why you take them. Bring this list or your pill bottles when you see your health care provider. Do not take any medicines, over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, herbs or food supplements without first talking to your health care provider.

Always take your medicine as directed. Call your health care provider if you think your medicines are not helping or if you are feeling side effects. Do not stop taking any of your medicines without first talking with your health care provider.

Your medicines may include one or more of the following:

- **Antibiotics** can fight or prevent further infection. Take them as ordered until they are gone, even if you feel better. Stopping them too soon may make the medicine unable to kill all of the germs. Never “save” antibiotics or take leftover antibiotics that were given to you for another illness.

- **An “expectorant” cough medicine** can help loosen phlegm in your lungs and make it easier to cough up. Drink plenty of water if you are taking an expectorant. Coughing the phlegm out of your lungs can help you breathe easier.

- **A cough “suppressant”** can decrease your urge to cough. If your cough is producing mucus, do not take a cough suppressant unless your health care provider tells you to. For example, your health care provider may suggest that you take a cough suppressant at night so you can rest.

- **Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines** (the kind you can buy without a prescription) may be used for many reasons, such as for pain or fever. These are safe for most people to use and can help you feel better. If used incorrectly, however, they can cause serious problems. Follow directions on the label carefully, and talk with your health care provider about using these medicines.

- **Steroids** can open your air passages so you can breathe easier. Do not stop taking this medicine without talking with your health care provider. Stopping on your own can cause problems.

- **Inhalers** can help you breathe easier and cough less. An inhaler gives medicine in a mist form so that you can breathe it into your lungs. Using an inhaler the right way takes practice. Ask questions if you don’t understand the instructions you were given.
Home care instructions

**Do not smoke** or allow others to smoke around you. Smoking increases your risk of lung infections and other problems. Talk to your health care provider if you need help quitting. Avoid air pollution and smoke from fireplaces.

**Cover your mouth and nose** with a scarf if you need to be outside during cold weather.

**Use a cool mist humidifier or a vaporizer** to increase air moisture in your home. This may help you breathe easier and cough less. Wash the humidifier each day with soap and warm water to keep it free of germs.

**Eat a variety of healthy foods every day** to help your body fight illness. Eat fruits, vegetables, breads and protein (such as chicken, fish and beans). Ask your health care provider if you should decrease your intake of dairy (milk) products while you are coughing up phlegm.

**Drink enough liquids every day.** Most people should drink at least eight cups of water a day. This helps to keep your air passages moist and better able to get rid of germs and other irritants.

**Get plenty of rest.** Slowly start to do more each day. Rest when you feel it is needed.

**While you are sick, do not drink alcohol.** Alcohol dulls your urge to cough and sneeze. When you have pneumonia, you need to be able to cough and sneeze to clear your air passages. Alcohol also causes your body to lose fluid. This can make the mucus in your lungs thicker and harder to cough up.

**Practice deep breathing and coughing** to open the air passages and bring up sputum (mucus) from your lungs. Take a deep breath and hold the breath as long as you can. Then push the air out of your lungs with a deep, strong cough. Put any sputum that you have coughed up into a tissue and throw it away. Take 10 deep breaths in a row every hour that you are awake. Remember to follow each deep breath with a cough.

Other wellness hints

**Ask your health care provider if you should get vaccinated against the flu or pneumonia.** The best time to get a flu shot is in October or November. Flu shots are good for one year. Pneumonia shots are good for at least five years, depending on your age.

**Avoid spreading germs.** You can decrease your chance of getting lung infections and other illnesses by doing the following:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Carry germ-killing hand lotion or gel with you to clean your hands when there is no water available.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth unless you have washed your hands first.
- Always cover your mouth when you cough. It is best to cough into a tissue or your shirtsleeve, rather than into your hand. People around you should also cover their mouths when they cough.
- Try to avoid people who have a cold or the flu. If you are sick, stay away from others as much as possible.

**Call your health care provider if you have:**

- Shaking, chills or fever
- A rash or itchy skin; you may be having a reaction to your medicines
- Breathing problems that do not go away or get worse
- A persistent cough, or if you cough up blood
- Questions or concerns about your pneumonia

**Seek help right away – call 911 or get to the nearest hospital or clinic – if:**

- You feel faint or have new problems thinking clearly.
- Your lips or fingernails turn dusky or blue.
- You find it very hard to breathe.
- You have swelling of your lips, tongue or throat that makes it hard to breathe or swallow.