



Understanding Pneumonitis

About 5% of people with pneumonitis will develop the chronic form.

1. Introduction

Pneumonitis refers to the general inflammation of lung tissue not caused by an infection. This allergic reaction occurs when a foreign substance like mold or bacteria is inhaled and irritates the air sacs in the lungs, triggering a strong immune response. Pneumonitis is treatable; however, long-term exposure to irritants can cause permanent lung damage.

2. Types

The different types of pneumonitis are categorized according to their cause. These include:

- + **Acute interstitial pneumonitis** – develops suddenly, and symptoms quickly worsen with the cause unknown
- + **Chemical pneumonitis** – develops after inhaling chemicals that appear in household or workplace products such as chlorine gas or pesticides
- + **Hypersensitivity pneumonitis** – a type of allergy that develops when a person inhales allergens including bacteria, dust, mold or animal dander
- + **Radiation pneumonitis** – may occur after radiation therapy used in treating cancer

3. Symptoms

The first symptoms of pneumonitis will usually appear within 4 to 6 hours after breathing in the irritant. Early signs may feel like the flu and include common cold-like symptoms such as:

- + Fever or chills
- + Headache
- + Muscle or joint pain

These symptoms should go away after a few days. Continued exposure to irritants can cause chronic pneumonitis, a more long-term condition, resulting in symptoms like:

- + Dry cough
- + Tightness in the chest
- + Appetite loss and unintentional weight loss
- + Extreme tiredness
- + Long-term bronchitis

4. Treatments

The first step in treatment is to try to avoid the irritant that triggered the condition. If a patient has a job that makes it difficult to avoid triggers, they can lower their exposure by wearing protective gear and improving ventilation. For more severe cases, treatment options may involve corticosteroids, oxygen therapy, pulmonary rehabilitation or, in the most serious cases, lung transplants.

Did you know?

Some jobs — including farming, bird and animal handling and woodworking — may increase the risk of developing pneumonitis.

For more information on pneumonitis and supportive resources, please visit [nhlbi.nih.gov](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov).

References:

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/24810-pneumonitis>

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<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hypersensitivity-pneumonitis>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pneumonitis/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20352628>