Nontuberculous mycobacteria (NTM) lung disease
Nontuberculous mycobacteria (NTM) lung disease
NTM lung disease is a serious disease caused by bacteria commonly found in soil and water. It can cause damage to the lungs and make people very ill.

NTM lung disease mainly affects women over 50 years old, of European and Asian descent.

It is more commonly found in warmer climates.

Signs and symptoms of NTM lung disease

Signs and symptoms of NTM lung disease include:
- coughing
- weight loss
- loss of appetite
- night sweats and fever
- lack of energy
- breathing problems
- chest pain.

Diagnosis of NTM lung disease

NTM lung disease is often diagnosed incorrectly, or not diagnosed at all. It is diagnosed using a CT scan and an acid-fast bacilli smear test of your sputum (the thick liquid that comes from your respiratory tract when you cough).

Regular chest x-rays do not provide enough information to make an accurate diagnosis.

Treatment of NTM lung disease

Not all patients with NTM lung disease require immediate treatment, but they should be assessed by a specialist familiar with the condition (one who has managed patients with this disease before).

Antibiotics are used to treat NTM lung disease. Successful treatment can take 18 to 24 months. Some people will make a full recovery, while others need ongoing monitoring for the rest of their life.

It may be important to identify how and where NTM exposure happened (for example, a contaminated spa bath) to reduce the risk of further infections.

Prevention of NTM lung disease

The best way to prevent NTM lung disease is to make sure all your taps and water appliances (showers, baths, spa baths) are installed and working correctly, and your hot water system is operating at the recommended temperature (~60 °C).

If you are gardening – particularly if you are working with soil or potting mix – wear a dust mask to avoid breathing in particulate matter which could contain NTM.

Living with NTM lung disease

An important part of living with NTM lung disease is managing your symptoms. Try to get enough rest, eat healthy food and look out for side effects of treatment as guided by your doctor.

Physiotherapy to clear the airways by removing any sputum from the lungs is very important. A specialist physiotherapist familiar with the latest lung clearance exercises is essential.

Managing an illness like NTM lung disease can be challenging both physically and emotionally. You may want to consider seeking support through a mental health professional or through joining a support group of other people going through a similar situation.

You may want to join an online support group or join or create a support group in your local area.

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Where to get help

• Your doctor
• NTM Australia
• Lung Foundation Australia Tel. 1800 654 301
• Palliative Care Victoria Tel. (03) 9662 9644

References

• Airway clearance. NTM Info and Research, USA.

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More information

Lungs

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Lung basics
- Environmental concerns
- Lung infections
- Lung conditions
- Breathing difficulty

Lung basics

- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
  CPR is a life-saving skill that everyone should learn from an accredited organisation...

- e-cigarettes
  What do the experts say about electronic cigarettes. Electronic cigarettes – or e-cigarettes – simulate the act of smoking, but you don’t burn tobacco when you use them...

- Pulmonary hypertension
  Pulmonary hypertension is high blood pressure on the lungs...

- Respiratory system
  The respiratory system takes up oxygen from the air we breathe and expels the unwanted carbon dioxide...

- Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)
  Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a potentially fatal type of pneumonia caused by a virus called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). There is currently no cure or vaccine. Treatment...

- Smoking - effects on your body
  Along with nicotine, people who smoke inhale about 7,000 other chemicals in cigarette smoke. Many of these chemicals come from burning tobacco leaf. Some of these compounds are chemically active and...

- What to expect when you quit smoking
  When you decide to quit smoking, it can help to find out what to expect as you work through the process. Some people have only a few mild symptoms when they quit but others find it harder. While...

Environmental concerns

- Air pollution
  Around 75 per cent of Melbourne’s air pollution is caused by vehicle emissions...

- Asbestos and your health
  When asbestos fibres become airborne, people working with asbestos may inhale particles which remain in their lungs...

- Aspergillus
  Aspergillus is a fungus that commonly grows on rotting vegetation. It can cause asthma symptoms...

- Bushfire smoke

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Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health.

- **Cadmium**
  Low-level exposure to cadmium over a long period of time may cause health effects because cadmium can accumulate in the body.

- **Disease clusters**
  Disease clusters are rare but can cause community concern about the possible effects of exposure to environmental hazards.

- **Passive smoking**
  Passive smoking means breathing other people's second-hand tobacco smoke. Passive smoking increases the risk of serious illness in both children and adults.

- **Smoke from planned burns**
  Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health. Planned burns are an important part of reducing the risk of bushfires.

- **Wood fires and breathing problems**
  The smoke from wood fires can affect air quality and may affect people's health.

**Lung infections**

- **Bronchiolitis**
  Bronchiolitis is a common chest infection in babies under six months of age.

- **Flu (influenza)**
  Influenza (the flu) is caused by a virus. The flu is more than just a bad cold and can occasionally lead to serious complications, including death. Specific antiviral medication is available. It is...

- **Legionnaire's disease**
  Legionnaire's disease is a rare form of pneumonia.

- **Pleurisy**
  Treating any infection of the upper respiratory tract quickly will reduce the risk of developing pleurisy.

- **Pneumonia**
  Anyone can get pneumonia, but young children and the elderly are most susceptible.

- **Psittacosis - parrot fever**
  People who have birds as pets, poultry workers and anyone working in aviaries or pet shops, are most at risk of catching psittacosis.

- **Tuberculosis (TB)**
  Tuberculosis is spread when a person with an active infection coughs, laughs, sings or sneezes.

- **Tuberculosis treatment**
  Tuberculosis can be cured in almost all cases by taking the medications for the full course of treatment, usually at least six months.

- **Whooping cough**
  The major symptom of whooping cough is a severe cough, which is often followed by a 'whooping' sound.

- **Whooping cough – a family’s experience (video)**
  A family shares their experience when their baby daughter contracted whooping cough (or pertussis).

**Lung conditions**

- **Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease - diagnosis (video)**
  Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a serious, progressive and disabling condition that limits airflow in the lungs. Hear from individuals who have been diagnosed.

- **Cystic fibrosis (CF)**
  When a person has cystic fibrosis, their mucus glands secrete very thick sticky mucus that clogs the tiny air passages in the lungs and traps bacteria.

- **Emphysema**
  Emphysema is generally caused by cigarette smoking or long-term exposure to certain industrial pollutants or dusts.

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• Granulomatosis with polyangiitis

Granulomatosis with polyangiitis (GPA), formerly known as Wegener granulomatosis is a rare condition that targets the arteries, veins and capillaries of the kidneys and the respiratory system.

• Lung cancer

Lung cancer occurs most often in adults between the ages of 40 and 70 who have smoked cigarettes for at least 20 years.

• Lung conditions - chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is the collective term for a number of lung diseases that prevent proper breathing.

• Lymphangioleiomyomatosis (LAM)

Lymphangioleiomyomatosis (LAM) is a rare lung disease that can affect women during their reproductive years.

• Mesothelioma

Mesothelioma is a rare type of cancer that can develop decades after exposure to asbestos.

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• Pulmonary hypertension

Pulmonary hypertension is high blood pressure on the lungs.

• Sarcoidosis

Sarcoidosis is not a cancer or any other sort of malignant tumour.

• Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a potentially fatal type of pneumonia caused by a virus called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). There is currently no cure or vaccine. Treatment.

Breathing difficulty

• Asthma explained

Asthma cannot be cured, but with good management people with asthma can lead normal, active lives.

• Choking

Don't slap a choking person on the back while they are upright - gravity may cause the object to slip further down their windpipe.

• Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease - diagnosis (video)

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a serious, progressive and disabling condition that limits airflow in the lungs. Hear from individuals who have been diagnosed.

• Coughing and wheezing in children

Coughing and wheezing in babies can be distressing for you and your baby, but in most cases symptoms can be relieved at home.

• Croup

Croup is a viral infection of the throat and windpipe that causes noisy breathing, a hoarse voice and a harsh, barking cough.

• Pulmonary hypertension

Pulmonary hypertension is high blood pressure on the lungs.

• Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a potentially fatal type of pneumonia caused by a virus called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). There is currently no cure or vaccine. Treatment.

• Sleep apnoea

A person with sleep apnoea may wake hundreds of times every night.

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