

IDENTIFYING & TREATING

PNEUMONIA IN SENIORS



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Introduction

Pneumonia may not seem like a serious diagnosis, but for seniors, the condition can quickly turn life threatening. In fact, pneumonia is the 5th leading cause of death among seniors. Because pneumonia can become deadly for adults over age 65, it's important for both seniors and their family members to understand the causes and symptoms of the disease.

This guide is designed to give seniors and their family members the information they need to identify the common symptoms of pneumonia and understand the best way to a safe and speedy recovery.

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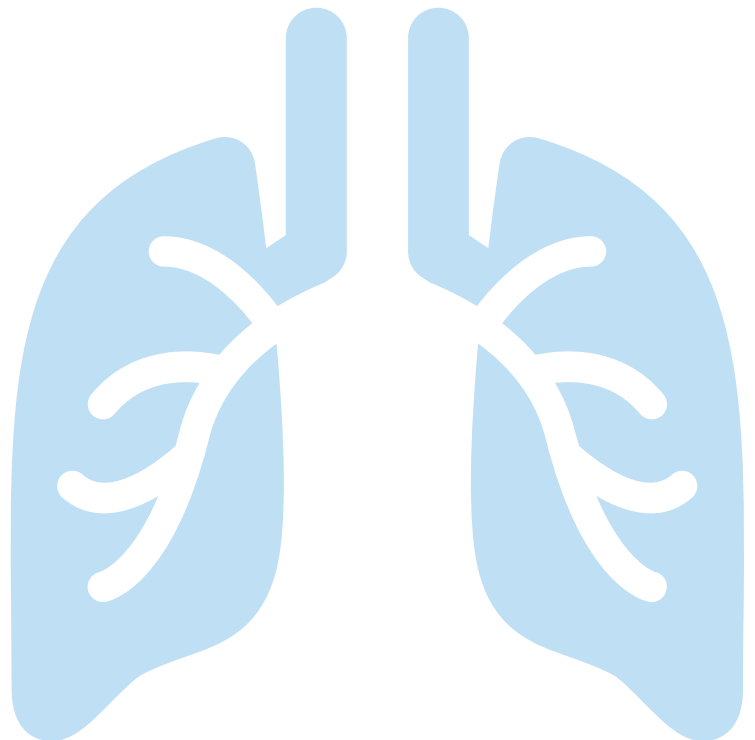
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Pneumonia Overview

Pneumonia is an infection in the lungs that can be caused by various sources, like bacteria, viruses, or fungi. Bacterial pneumonia is the most common cause of pneumonia in the US and can be the most serious. Viral pneumonia is more common in young children and is usually very mild. Finally, pneumonia caused by fungi is more commonly found in individuals with chronic health problems or weakened immune systems.

Regardless of how pneumonia is contracted, the condition causes inflammation in the air sacs (alveoli), which may also fill with liquid or pus. Pneumonia may affect a single lung, both lungs, or just certain lobes within the lung. The disease can make breathing difficult and cause the lungs to be less effective in providing oxygen to the blood.



Symptoms of Pneumonia

There are many symptoms associated with pneumonia. However, the symptoms can vary from person to person, making it difficult for seniors or their loved ones to recognize the disease. Some symptoms may also be very mild, making it hard for seniors to even notice them. That's why it's important for seniors and their loved ones to know what the potential symptoms are.

Below are some of the most common symptoms presented with pneumonia.

- ⦿ Coughing: Pneumonia often causes a cough that results in green or yellow phlegm. This cough may also be accompanied by chest pain.
- ⦿ Shortness of Breath: Pneumonia may cause belabored breathing, including rapid or shallow breaths.
- ⦿ Weakness: Due to the lack of oxygen in the blood and extra effort required to breathe, seniors may experience weakness or lack of energy.
- ⦿ Confusion: Seniors may experience confusion or changes in mental sharpness as a symptom of pneumonia.
- ⦿ Fever or Chills: Seniors may experience low body temperatures, fever, and chills. They may experience sweating or shaking as well.
- ⦿ Loss of Appetite: Pneumonia may cause a loss of appetite, although this may be a result of aging or other health conditions as well.

Diagnosing Pneumonia

Pneumonia can be difficult to diagnose because the symptoms vary. However, doctors can diagnose pneumonia by reviewing your medical history, performing a physical examination, and conducting diagnostic tests, like blood tests, pulse oximetry, or chest X-rays.

Adults ages 65 and older should pay close attention to symptoms and should seek medical attention as soon as possible, especially if they have underlying health conditions. Delaying a diagnosis and proper treatment could result in serious health threats.



Pneumonia Treatment

Luckily there are several ways to treat pneumonia, so seniors can get back to feeling like themselves. While your doctor will work with you on a personalized healthcare plan, here are a few of the treatment options available:

- ⦿ **PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION:** Pneumonia caused by bacteria can be treated with an antibiotic. It's important to take all of the prescribed medication until it's gone, even if symptoms start to improve. Viral pneumonia cannot be treated with an antibiotic; however, a doctor may prescribe an antiviral medication to help with symptoms.
- ⦿ **OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATION:** In addition to prescription medication, seniors can also take over-the-counter medicines that may help with symptoms. Consider a pain reliever or cough medicine to help calm your lungs so you can rest and recover.
- ⦿ **REST:** Getting enough sleep and resting while your body recovers may help seniors recover more quickly and reduce the risk of complications. You may need to cease some of your daily activities until your symptoms subside.
- ⦿ **HYDRATION:** Drink plenty of fluids while your body recovers from pneumonia. Drinking water, especially, can help loosen the mucus in the lungs that has built up as a result of the infection, making it easier to expel from the lungs.

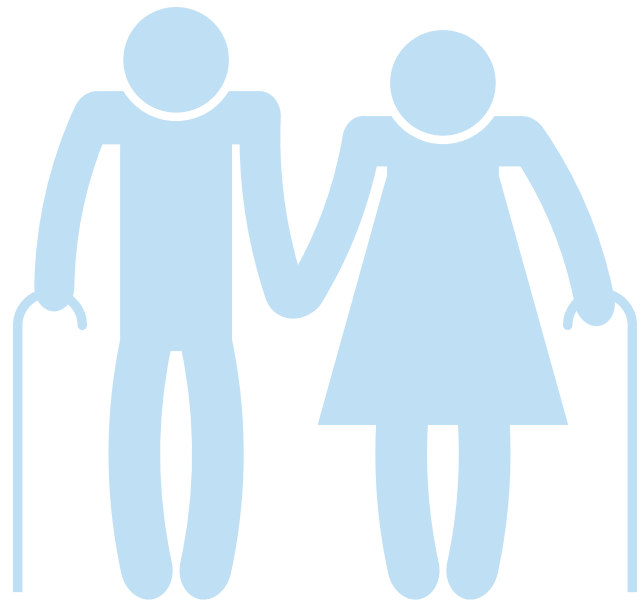
Depending on the type of pneumonia and the health condition of the senior, recovery can take anywhere from 1 week to 8 weeks.

Why Seniors are at Risk

While anyone can contract pneumonia, seniors are at a higher risk than the general population because the immune system naturally weakens with age. Additionally, seniors typically suffer from chronic illnesses or other health conditions that compound pneumonia risk factors.

Seniors also tend to be physically weaker than other adults, causing them to be less effective at coughing, which helps the body naturally expel the source of an infection. Therefore, the inability to productively cough could lead to a lingering infection.

Finally, seniors who live in a nursing home, assisted living facility, or who are frequently in the hospital are at a higher risk for developing pneumonia. Institutional settings have large groups of people who may be sick, leading to increased exposure to bacteria, viruses, or other causes of pneumonia.



Caring for Seniors with Pneumonia

If a loved one is diagnosed with pneumonia, there are some special considerations you should make to provide the best environment for recovery. Here are some tips on caring for a senior with pneumonia.

CAREFULLY MONITOR SYMPTOMS

Pay close attention to your loved one and how their symptoms are progressing. Any worsening of symptoms should be a sign to seek medical attention immediately.

HELP WITH HOUSEHOLD CHORES

While your loved one is recovering from pneumonia, they may not be able to perform regular tasks, like cleaning. If possible, help with household chores so that your aging loved one can devote all of their energy to a speedy recovery instead of worrying about completing tasks at home.

MANAGE MEALS

Many seniors with pneumonia will experience a loss of appetite. It's important to make sure that they receive the proper nutrients and hydration to recover.

HELP WITH MEDICATION

Seniors may have trouble keeping track of their medications, so family caregivers can help administer prescribed or over-the-counter medicine to their loved ones. This can help ensure that seniors receive the proper dosage of medication on the correct schedule.

CONTROL PROPER ORAL HYGIENE

Good oral hygiene can reduce bad bacteria that cause the lung infection. Keeping teeth and gums healthy may decrease the risk of pneumonia by reducing bacteria in the mouth.

Caring for Seniors with Pneumonia

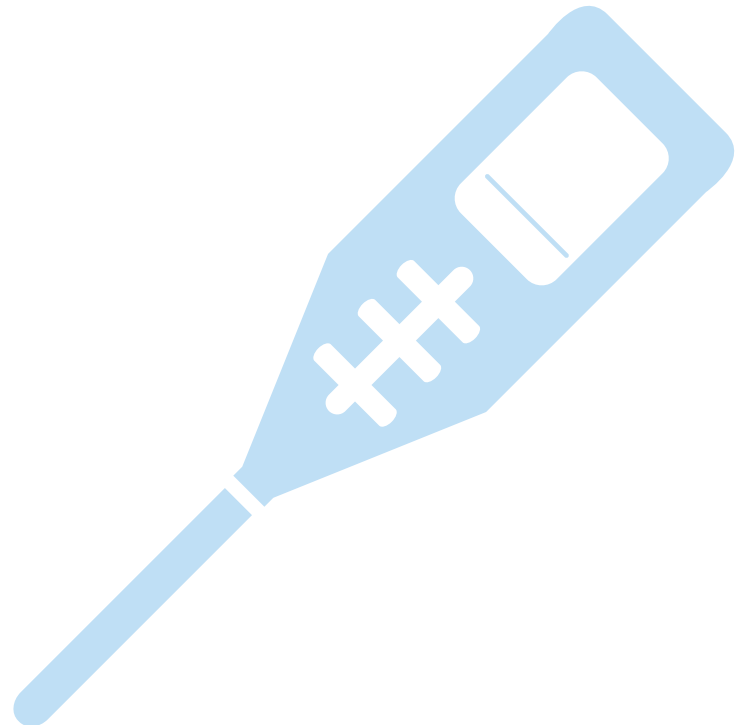
GIVE RIDES TO DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENTS

Seniors will likely have doctor's appointments or need to pick up prescriptions. Family caregivers can help ease this burden by assisting with transportation.

HIRE A PROFESSIONAL CAREGIVER

You may also want to consider hiring a professional caregiver to tend to your loved one while they recover. An in-home caregiver from Caring Senior Service can help with many of the tasks already mentioned, which can provide peace of mind if you aren't able to care for your loved one personally.

Learn more about our professional caregiving services to help your loved one with pneumonia.



Tips for Preventing

While there are treatments available for pneumonia, it's always better to try to prevent the disease in the first place. Luckily, there are many ways to help protect yourself or a loved one from developing pneumonia.

1 GET VACCINATED

Because pneumonia can be brought on by the flu, it's important for seniors and their loved ones to get a flu shot each year. Additionally, seniors should receive vaccinations against bacterial pneumonia or other infections that could potentially lead to pneumonia.

2 MAINTAIN GOOD HYGIENE

It's important to maintain good hygiene, like frequently washing your hands and brushing your teeth. Maintaining good hygiene can help seniors protect themselves against infections or bacteria that could lead to pneumonia.

3 AVOID SMOKING

Smoking can agitate the lungs and tobacco has shown to reduce the lungs' ability to fight off infection, leaving smokers at a higher risk of developing pneumonia.

4 CONTINUE HEALTHY HABITS

Exercising regularly, getting enough sleep, and maintaining proper nutrition can help keep your immune system strong and healthy. A strong immune system can help fight off some of the potential causes of pneumonia.

Conclusion

While pneumonia can be a serious condition for seniors, increasing awareness about the potential risks and symptoms of the disease can help seniors get the care they need faster so that they can recovery quickly and safely at home.

For more information about caring for an aging loved one with pneumonia, reach out to Caring Senior Service. Our professional caregivers are specially trained to aid seniors during their recovery.



Resources

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pneumonia/symptoms-causes/syc-20354204>

<https://www.lung.org/lung-health-and-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/pneumonia/symptoms-and-diagnosis.html>

<https://www.care.com/senior-care-caring-for-seniors-with-pneumonia-and-the-flu-p1143-q317308.html>

<https://www.aging.com/what-causes-pneumonia-in-the-elderly/>



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