



Patient education: Chronic pulmonary aspergillosis (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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What is chronic pulmonary aspergillosis?

This is a lung disease that causes weight loss, cough, and other symptoms. It lasts for longer than 3 months. It is caused by infection with a fungus called "Aspergillus."

Chronic pulmonary aspergillosis happens in people who already have lung damage or disease, such as:

- Tuberculosis – This is a lung infection caused by a certain type of bacteria.
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease ("COPD") – This is a lung condition that makes it hard to breathe.
- Sarcoidosis – This disease causes clusters of abnormal tissue called "granulomas" to form in the body. It can cause scar tissue to form in the lungs.
- Allergic bronchopulmonary aspergillosis – This is an allergic reaction to the Aspergillus fungus.
- Lung cancer that was treated in the past
- Pneumothorax in the past – Pneumothorax is a collapsed lung.

Some other conditions raise your risk of chronic pulmonary aspergillosis. These include:

- Diabetes
- Alcohol misuse
- Taking steroid medicines – These make it harder for the immune system to work correctly.

What are the symptoms of chronic pulmonary aspergillosis?

The symptoms include:

- Losing weight without trying
- Coughing – The cough often brings up mucus. Some people cough up blood. A mild cough is the only symptom some people have.
- Feeling short of breath – You might feel like you cannot get enough air or have to work harder than normal to breathe.
- Feeling tired
- Chest pain – This might be a sharp, stabbing pain that gets worse when you breathe in.

Some people have a fever or get hot and sweaty at night.

Should I see a doctor or nurse?

Call your doctor or nurse right away if you:

- Have a cough and are losing weight without trying
 - Cough up blood
 - Have sharp, stabbing chest pain that gets worse when breathing in
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Will I need tests?

Yes. The doctor or nurse will do an exam and learn about your symptoms. You will have some or all of these tests:

- Chest X-ray
- CT scan of the chest – This is an imaging test that uses a special X-ray to create pictures of the inside of the body. It can show more detail than a regular X-ray.
- Blood tests
- Breathing tests – You breathe hard into a tube. The tests show how well your lungs are working.
- Tests on a sample of mucus you cough up
- Bronchoscopy – This is a procedure in which a doctor uses a thin tube (called a "bronchoscope") to look inside your lungs and get a sample of fluid. You might have

this if other tests do not show whether you have chronic pulmonary aspergillosis for sure.

How is chronic pulmonary aspergillosis treated?

Treatment depends on your situation, including any other lung problems you have.

Treatments can include:

- Medicines – These can kill the fungus that causes aspergillosis. You might take pills by mouth or get medicine through an "IV," which is a thin tube that goes into a vein.
- "Embolization" – In this procedure, a doctor blocks blood vessels that are leaking into the lung. To do this, the doctor puts a thin tube into a blood vessel in the leg. Next, they move the tube up to the area that is bleeding. The doctor uses the tube to put something in the blood vessel to block it, such as tiny plastic beads. You might have this procedure if you are coughing up a lot of blood.
- Surgery – Aspergillosis sometimes causes a ball of fungus, mucus, and cells to form in the lung. This is called an "aspergilloma" or "fungus ball." If it causes symptoms, such as coughing up blood, doctors might do surgery to take it out. But if a fungus ball does not cause symptoms, you might not need treatment right away. Your doctor can do regular exams and X-rays to check on it and treat it if it gets worse.
- Oxygen – If you have trouble breathing, you might need extra oxygen. You can get extra oxygen through a tube that goes to your nose or a mask you wear.

If you have surgery or embolization, you will probably also take medicine to kill the fungus. This can help keep it from spreading.

Many people who have chronic pulmonary aspergillosis need to take medicine for a long time, sometimes for life. They need regular exams, blood tests, and chest X-rays to check how well the medicine is working. If it is not working well, they might need to switch treatments.

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