

# Asbestosis

---

## KEY POINTS

- Asbestosis is a lung disease that causes scar tissue in your lungs that can make it hard to breathe.
  - There is no cure for asbestosis, but treatments can help relieve symptoms. Treatment may include oxygen or exercises to improve your strength and breathing as advised by your healthcare provider.
  - Take care of yourself by avoiding smoking, smoky places, second hand smoke, polluted air, dust, fumes, and mold. Wash your hands often, get a flu shot each year, and make sure your pneumonia shot is current.
- 

## What is asbestosis?

Asbestosis is a lung disease that causes scar tissue in your lungs. As the disease worsens, the scar tissue gets thicker and makes it harder to breathe. Because of the asbestosis, there is less oxygen in your blood, so your body does not get enough oxygen to work properly.

Asbestosis is most common in adults between the ages of 40 and 70.

## What is the cause?

Asbestosis is caused by inhaling large amounts of asbestos fibers over a long time. Until the 1970s, asbestos was used to:

- Fireproof ceiling tiles and drywall
- Make brakes, floor tiles, roof shingles, and other products
- Strengthen cement
- Insulate pipes, boilers, and attics

Asbestos fibers do not cause problems unless they are released into the air, such as when older buildings are remodeled or destroyed. People most at risk for asbestosis are:

- People who worked with products containing asbestos
- Family members of workers who were exposed to asbestos. The fibers may be released from clothes, shoes, or hair.
- People who live in areas where asbestos dust is in the soil

The risk is greatest for people who were exposed for several months or years to dust from asbestos.

## **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms may not start for 10 or more years after exposure. Symptoms may include:

- A dry cough
- Shortness of breath, at first only when you are active, but over time the shortness of breath happens even at rest
- Feeling tired all the time
- Weight loss
- Widening and rounding of the tips of the fingers or toes (clubbing)

## **How is it diagnosed?**

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms, medical history, and work history, and examine you. Tests may include:

- Blood tests
- Spirometry, which is a breathing test that measures how well you breathe in and breathe out
- Chest X-ray
- CT scan, which uses X-rays and a computer to show detailed pictures of your chest
- A biopsy to remove a small sample of lung or pleural (lining of the lung) tissue for testing
- A bronchoscopy, which uses a flexible, lighted tube passed through your mouth and down into your lungs to see abnormal areas or if there is cancer

## **How is it treated?**

There is no cure for asbestosis. Once scar tissue has formed, the tissue cannot go back to normal. Treatments can help you:

- Breathe better and feel better
- Be more active

Your healthcare provider may recommend:

- Quitting smoking and making changes in your environment so you are not around secondhand smoke or other things that can irritate your lungs
- Oxygen therapy to help you feel less short of breath and more energetic
- Respiratory therapy to teach you how to exercise your lungs and how to manage your disease

## **How can I take care of myself?**

Follow the full course of treatment prescribed by your healthcare provider. In addition:

- If you smoke, it is important to quit. Talk to your healthcare provider about ways to quit smoking.
- Avoid breathing dust, chemical fumes, any type of smoke, polluted air, and mold.

- Stay physically active as advised by your provider. This helps you keep your strength up. It also helps keep your lungs working. Talk to your healthcare provider before you start a new exercise program.
- Practice breathing exercises as advised by your provider or your respiratory therapist.
- Get a flu shot as soon as it is available in the fall to protect against flu.
- Ask your healthcare provider if you should get the pneumonia shot. This vaccine helps prevent serious complications of pneumonia such as an infection of the blood or brain.
- Join a support group in your area for people with lung diseases or chronic diseases.
- Take care of your health. Try to get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Eat a variety of healthy foods and try to keep a healthy weight. If you want to drink alcohol, ask your healthcare provider how much is safe for you to drink. Learn ways to manage stress.
- Contact your healthcare provider if you have new or worsening symptoms.

Ask your provider:

- How and when you will get your test results
- If there are activities you should avoid
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them
- Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

*This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.*

Developed by Change Healthcare.

Published by Change Healthcare.

Produced in Cork, Ireland.