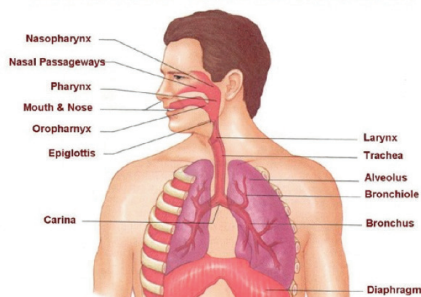


RESPIRATORY TRACT INFECTIONS

Peter Zajac, DO, FACOFP, Author

Amy J. Keenum, DO, PharmD, Editor • Ronald Januchowski, DO, FACOFP, Health Literacy Editor

Respiratory System Diseases and Disorders



Respiratory tract infections are any infection that affect the nose, sinuses, and throat (i.e. the upper respiratory tract) or airways and lungs (i.e. the lower respiratory tract). Viruses are the main cause of the infections, but bacteria can cause some. You can spread the infection to others through the air when you sneeze or cough. You can also spread the infection by indirect contact, for example, by rubbing your nose or eyes before touching a surface that another person may then touch. Common symptoms of an upper respiratory tract infection may include a cough, mild fever, headaches, a runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, sneezing, body aches, and fatigue. Whereas, common symptoms of a lower respiratory tract infection may include a severe cough with phlegm and mucus, difficulty in breathing, wheezing, a tight feeling in your chest, weakness, fever, and fatigue.

HOME MANAGEMENT INCLUDES:

- Drinking plenty of clear fluids and rest. Vitamin-C may help boost your immune system. Over-the-counter pain relievers such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen can be helpful for fevers and to ease any aches. Saline (salt) nose drops, lozenges, and vapor rubs can also help symptoms when used as directed by your physician.
- A cool mist humidifier can make breathing easier by thinning mucus.
- If you smoke, you should try to stop smoking for good! Avoid second-hand smoking also.
- In most cases, antibiotics are not recommended because they are only effective if bacteria caused the infection.
- Other treatments, that your Osteopathic Family Physician may prescribe, include Osteopathic Manipulative Therapy (OMT). OMT can help clear mucus, relieve congestion, improve breathing and enhance comfort, relaxation, and immune function.
- Generally, the symptoms of a respiratory tract infection usually pass within one to two weeks.
- To prevent spreading infections, sneeze into the arm of your shirt or in a tissue. Also, practice good hygiene such as regularly washing your hands with soap and warm water. Wipe down common surfaces, such as door knobs and faucet handles, with a disinfectant spray. Do not share cups or utensils.
- To avoid any possible complications of an acute respiratory tract infection, it is strongly recommended that very young children, older adults, and people with immune system disorders, heart disease and/or other chronic conditions such as lung problems who develop a respiratory infection visit their Family Physician.
- You can also be vaccinated against some respiratory tract infections, such as the flu and pneumonia.

MEDICAL CARE & TREATMENT OPTIONS:

If you have any questions about respiratory tract infections, please contact your Osteopathic Family Physician. Your physician can diagnose an upper or lower respiratory tract infection with a thorough history and physical exam along with any appropriate tests. Management includes the right treatment plan and any necessary follow-up with your doctor. Your family doctor will help you determine which current recommended treatment(s) will work best for you. In case of any emergency, you should call your doctor or 911 right away.

SOURCE(S): Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), *Upper & Lower Respiratory Tract Infections. Gov, and Up-To-Date.*

The Osteopathic Family Physician Patient Handout is a public service of the ACOFP. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in many instances; however, they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis by a physician. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, ACOFP suggests that you consult your family physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with their patients.

For additional patient related educational material please visit our website at www.acofp.org