

Ways to Prevent Pneumonia in Elderly Adults



About one million Americans visit the hospital for pneumonia every year. More than 50,000 of them will die, 85% of which are seniors. That's because the elderly are both more likely to develop pneumonia and less likely to survive it. Knowing a few simple ways to prevent pneumonia in the elderly can literally save lives.

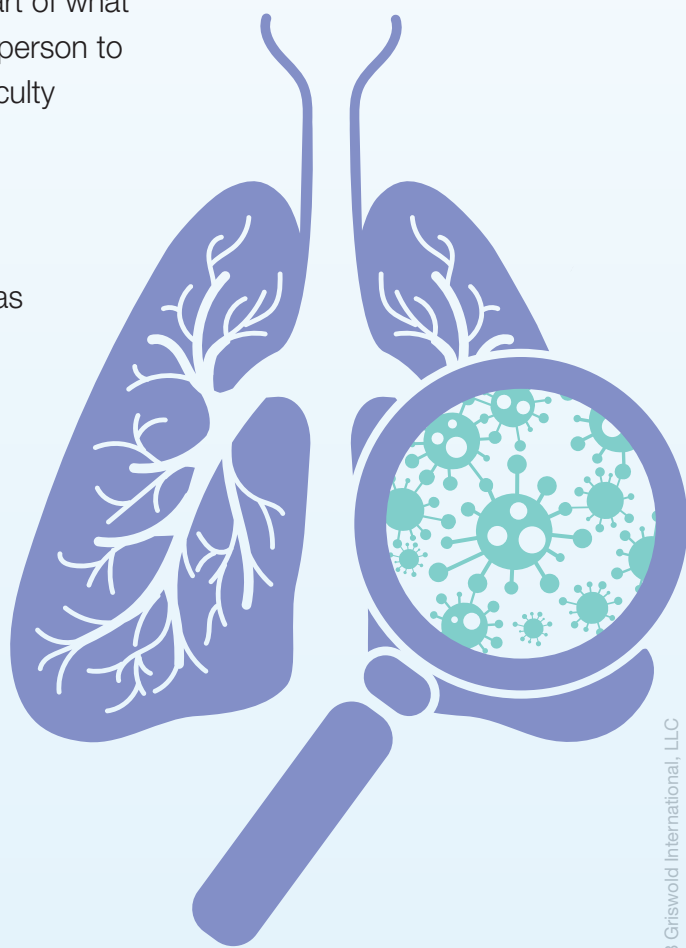
Know the Symptoms

Pneumonia is an infection in your lungs. Sometimes it's bacterial, sometimes it's fungal, and sometimes it's a virus. That's part of what makes pneumonia diverse, with symptoms that vary from person to person. Typically these symptoms include fever, chills, difficulty breathing, stabbing pain when coughing, headache, and clammy skin.

Can you have pneumonia without a fever? What about pneumonia without a cough? Many people think of these as hallmarks of pneumonia, but respiratory symptoms can actually be completely absent in infected seniors. For seniors with pneumonia, the most telling symptoms are often weakness, dizziness, delirium, and confusion.

For that reason, people with dementia or Alzheimer's may have a more difficult time accurately reporting their symptoms. If you have a loved one with preexisting conditions, being vigilant about monitoring changes in their health can be one of the only ways to catch a pneumonia infection early.

(continued...)



© 2018 Griswold International, LLC

Tips for Basic Prevention

Can a cold turn into pneumonia? Can bronchitis cause pneumonia? What about the flu? The short answer is yes—you're more likely to develop pneumonia after a respiratory infection. That's why many of the most effective things you can do to avoid pneumonia are as simple as keeping up the hygienic, healthy habits that are known to ward away sickness.

For example, being in poor health increases your risk of pneumonia. That means you should follow all of the usual advice about eating a healthy diet, getting enough rest, and staying active. Even dental hygiene plays a part in prevention, since tooth and gum infections can eventually lead to pneumonia.

And of course, it's important to try to avoid contact with anyone who has a respiratory infection. This can be difficult advice to follow because seniors often live in community environments where they're in regular contact with other people who have weakened immune systems. But exposure to other people with respiratory tract infections will increase the risk of becoming infected yourself.

Getting Annual Vaccinations

The single most important step a senior can take to reduce their risk of pneumonia is to get vaccinated. If you're over the age of 65, the CDC recommends you get a vaccination annually along with your flu shot. You can also get both of these vaccinations on the same day. These vaccinations can't guarantee you won't develop pneumonia, but they can lower your risk, prevent serious complications, and reduce the severity of your symptoms if you do become infected.

Staying Healthy in Old Age

When we're young and healthy, catching the flu might cost us a week of bed rest. As we age, we face decreased lung capacity and a diminished immune system. That also means an increased risk and vulnerability to respiratory infections. But by getting vaccinated and following basic steps to improve your health and hygiene, you can drastically reduce your chance of catching a completely avoidable infection.

