



The Children's Doctor

All you need to know about ... Bronchiolitis



What is bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is an infection of the small airways (bronchioles) of the lungs caused by a virus. It is most common in children under 12 months of age and is more likely to occur in winter. Because it is a viral infection, antibiotics are of NO benefit. It usually begins with "flu-like" symptoms - runny nose, cough and fever. The illness usually progresses over 3-4 days. Over this time, the cough worsens and wheeze develops. After 4 days, the symptoms will usually start to improve. However, it may take up to 4 weeks for the cough to resolve completely.

How should I treat bronchiolitis?

Paracetamol may be used to relieve fever. The recommended dose should NEVER be exceeded. Paracetamol will not reduce the duration or severity of the infection.

The most important treatment will be maintaining adequate fluid intake. Infants with bronchiolitis do not usually feed well and will require smaller feeds more often than usual. They may prefer clear fluids (diluted juice/cordial) to regular formula feeds. If your infant is breastfed, you should offer breastfeeds more often than usual to encourage adequate intake. If the infant has a very blocked nose, normal saline can be used to wash out the nostrils.

In severe cases, infants may require hospitalisation for oxygen therapy or intravenous fluids. These treatments are supportive but do not cure the underlying infection.

When should I seek help?

If your child has any of the following symptoms you should seek help immediately:

- * aged under 6 months
- * excessively drowsy or lethargic
- * difficulty with breathing
- * poor feeding or reduced oral intake
- * poor sleeping
- * persistent high fevers
- * background of health problems

You should always seek medical advice if you are concerned that your child is not improving.