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PLEURISY

Pleurisy is a condition in which the pleura — a membrane consisting of a layer of tissue that lines the inner side of the chest cavity and a layer of tissue that surrounds the lungs — becomes inflamed. Also called pleuritis, pleurisy causes sharp chest pain (pleuritic pain) that worsens during breathing.

The signs and symptoms of pleurisy might include:

1. Chest pain that worsens when you breathe, cough or sneeze
2. Shortness of breath — because you are trying to minimize breathing in and out
3. A cough — only in some cases
4. A fever — only in some cases

Pain caused by pleurisy also might affect your shoulder or back.

In some cases of pleurisy, fluid builds up in the small space between the two layers of tissue (pleural space). This is called pleural effusion. When there is a fair amount of fluid, pleuritic pain lessens or disappears because the two layers of pleura are no longer in contact. A large amount of fluid in the pleural space can create pressure, compressing your lung to the point that it partially or completely collapses. This makes breathing difficult and might cause you to cough. The extra fluid can also become infected. This is called an empyema. An empyema is often accompanied by fever.

Treatments used in pleurisy and pleural effusion focus primarily on the underlying cause. For example, if bacterial pneumonia is the cause, an antibiotic will control the infection. If the cause is viral, pleurisy will resolve on its own.

The outcome of pleurisy treatment depends on the seriousness of the underlying disease. If the condition that caused pleurisy is diagnosed and treated early, a full recovery is typical.