Acute bronchitis is a form of lower respiratory tract inflammation affecting the air tubes of the lungs. It usually comes on suddenly and can last for 3 to 10 days, though the cough can last up to six weeks. Acute bronchitis usually gets better on its own without the need for antibiotics. In fact, less than 10% of the cases are caused by a bacterium. Viruses do not require antibiotics. Yet about 70% of the cases are still being prescribed antibiotics. Side effects from antibiotics can be severe and in the event that you actually need antibiotics, they may be less effective. Irritation of the lungs from tobacco smoke, fumes, dust, and air pollution can be the cause of inflammation and commonly contribute to the condition.

Infections which usually start with a virus enter through the nose or throat and travel to the bronchial tubes. When the body tries to fight the infection, it causes the bronchial tubes to swell. This causes you to cough. Sometimes it is a dry cough, but often you will cough up mucus. The inflammation also causes less air to be able to move through the bronchial tubes, which can cause wheezing, chest tightness and shortness of breath. Acute bronchitis is temporary and usually does not cause any permanent breathing difficulties. Those that are more at risk for serious complications include those with a weakened immune system or other major health problems such as the elderly, young children, those with cancer or diabetes, and those who have not been immunized with the flu, pneumonia and whooping cough vaccines and met the criteria to have these vaccines administered. The most common symptoms of acute bronchitis are coughing up mucus, which may be yellow or green. Contrary to some beliefs, the color of the mucus does not indicate need for an antibiotic. Also runny and stuffy nose starting a few days before the chest congestion; Feeling run down or tired; Sore ribs from prolonged periods of coughing; Lacking desire to be active and making Wheezing or a whistling sounds while breathing.

Risk factors include close contact with someone who has a cold or acute bronchitis; Failure to get age appropriate immunizations; And exposure to tobacco smoke, fumes, dust and air pollution.

Most cases of bronchitis go away on their own. The infection simply has to run its course over several weeks although the cough can last for six weeks. You may need inhaled medicine to open up your airways if you were wheezing. Once again antibiotics have not been proven to shorten the course of acute bronchitis or lesson symptoms. Because viruses cause most cases, antibiotics or not generally used, as they are only effective against bacteria. Most patients treat themselves with over-the-counter cold remedies. Many of these are for the purpose of trying to make you feel better. One should know that none of them are for a cure and you should be aware of any potential side effects. In order to prevent acute bronchitis, you should wash your hands in order
to reduce exposure to viruses and bacteria. Get a flu shot every year. And you should consider a pneumonia shot, especially if you’re 60 years or older. If you smoke, quit and avoid lung irritants. To protect your lungs, where a mask over your mouth and nose when using lung irritants such as paint, paint remover, or varnish. In the event that a cough lasts over 6 weeks, you will need a chest x-ray. A new onset fever after the initial virus infection, or a persistent or rising fever are all signs of concern, and will probably require a visit to your health care provider and an antibiotic. Increasing weakness and/or pain, along with shortness of breath requires immediate attention.

Once again here at the Legitimate Practitioner we hope to bring you information to help you and your family and friends through another season.