Let’s Talk Bronchiectasis

Understanding non-cystic fibrosis bronchiectasis

Non-CF bronchiectasis is a rare lung condition not many people have heard of. If you know someone with non-CF bronchiectasis, you may be familiar with the constant coughing, tiredness, and frequent illnesses. And, you may have questions about their condition.

Sometimes it can be hard for people with non-CF bronchiectasis to explain exactly what is wrong with them. The following information was created to help you understand non-CF bronchiectasis, and what someone who has it is going through.

What is bronchiectasis?

Non-CF bronchiectasis is a rare chronic lung condition that occurs when damage to the airways causes them to widen, and become flabby and scarred. People with non-CF bronchiectasis have trouble clearing their airways, making breathing more difficult and making them more susceptible to infections.

In healthy airways, mucus doesn’t build up and get trapped, so air can move easily in and out of the lungs. In airways with non-CF bronchiectasis, mucus gets trapped, making breathing more difficult and increasing risk of frequent infections.
How does non-CF bronchiectasis differ from other lung conditions?
Lung conditions, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, and non-CF bronchiectasis, can all cause difficulty breathing, and are sometimes mistaken for one another. Yet, they all differ in their causes, diagnoses, and treatments. Only a doctor using special equipment can confirm a diagnosis of non-CF bronchiectasis.

What causes bronchiectasis?
For about half the people with the disease, the cause is unknown. For others, it can be traced to lung damage caused by infections, genetic or birth defects, chronic inflammatory conditions, or autoimmune diseases. Non-CF bronchiectasis is a type of bronchiectasis.

You can’t “catch” non-CF bronchiectasis
Despite the frequent coughing, non-CF bronchiectasis isn’t contagious. You won’t get non-CF bronchiectasis from being around someone who has it. However, people with non-CF bronchiectasis are susceptible to certain infections, some of which may be contagious to others.

Why do people with non-CF bronchiectasis cough all the time?
Non-CF bronchiectasis makes it difficult to properly move air in and out of the lungs, or to clear mucus. This is what leads to symptoms of a persistent cough and sometimes coughing up phlegm.

Other symptoms of non-CF bronchiectasis
In addition to a persistent cough, people with non-CF bronchiectasis may also experience frequent respiratory infections, tiredness, shortness of breath, chest pain, weight loss, and sometimes may cough up blood.

What you can do to help
When a loved one, coworker, or someone you care about has non-CF bronchiectasis, it can be difficult for everyone. The frequent illnesses, fatigue, and constant cough affect every part of their lives. It can be hard for others to understand that people with non-CF bronchiectasis have frequent respiratory infections that tend to last a long time. They may even need to be admitted to the hospital. It’s a good idea to wash your hands frequently around someone with non-CF bronchiectasis, especially if you are feeling a little sick.

Many people with non-CF bronchiectasis withdraw and become isolated as they don’t want to be a burden to others. The best thing that you can do is be supportive. Ask them how they are feeling, help them manage daily activities, and educate others about their condition.