

Bronchiolitis



What is wheezing?

Wheezing is a whistling high pitched sound that is made when your child breathes out and is always accompanied by coughing. The wheezing is caused by air being forced through narrowed airways in the lungs. Narrowing of the airways is typically caused by swelling of the lining inside the airway and by mucous inside the airway.

Most often parents will hear noisy breathing when their child's nose is blocked but this noise is heard when the child breathes in and is due to mucous in the nose. Stridor is the harsh breathing noise heard with a barking cough when a child has croup. Stridor is heard on both breathing in and breathing out.

Bronchiolitis

Bronchiolitis is a viral infection of the small airways of young children and causes wheezing and coughing. The virus that typically causes bronchiolitis is called RSV (Respiratory Syncytial virus) and occurs every year between March and August. The virus produces huge amounts of mucous in the nose and the chest and this leads to difficulty breathing.

The infection starts off as a snotty nose for about three days and this goes on to coughing, wheezing and rapid breathing. Be careful when the wheezing starts because it usually gets worse over the next 4 days before it starts to get better. About 1 in 10 children under the age of 1 year of age will require admission to

hospital for observation and treatment during the acute phase of the illness. This means that the majority of children will cough and wheeze for about 10 days but cope with the illness.

They are generally happy, not distressed and able to feed as long as their nose is kept clean allowing them to breathe. Remember that young children prefer to breathe through their nose and find it really hard to breathe through the mouth.

Bronchiolitis

Bronchiolitis causes a blocked nose, coughing and wheezing. The warning signs of bronchiolitis are:

- Children under 3 months of age
- Rapid breathing
- Difficulty breathing
- Poor feeding
- Blue lips and tongue
- High fever

How do we treat Bronchiolitis?

It is really important to understand that this infection takes its own time to get better. There is nothing that can be done to make a child get better faster than the natural course of events. We can certainly help to make the child more comfortable and to cope better with the infection.

The following steps are helpful:

- Treat the fever if present.
- Make sure the child is drinking the normal amount of fluid. This will be taken in smaller amounts than usual and more frequently than usual.
- Make sure the child's nose is clear of mucous. To do this you will have to flush the child's nose with a sterile saline solution. Remember that the saline has no magical medicinal property but it works by flushing the mucous through the nose and then into the throat where it is swallowed. So one drop in each nostril will not do

the trick. You need to use sufficient of the solution to be sure that the nose is properly clear.

- Make the child comfortable by making sure that the nappy is clean, the child is warm and is taking sufficient fluids.
- Medication does not help this condition. Many parents have nebulisers at home to use just in case the child has this kind of problem. Unfortunately nebulisation does not help the tight chest of a bronchiolitic. It may well help the very blocked up nose but this is just as easily treated with sterile saline nose drops or spray.
- Nebulisation is not usually beneficial but follow the advice of the treating doctor.

Are there long term problems after Bronchiolitis?

Children who have had RSV bronchiolitis and have required admission to hospital for oxygen support during the illness are at risk for frequent episodes of wheezing. The RSV does cause sufficient damage to the lungs that the children are at risk for wheezing every time they get a simple common cold. This wheezing on and off can go on for up to 5 years after the infection. In certain children there is also the possibility that this will go onto asthma.

Points to Remember

- ***Bronchiolitis is a viral infection that runs its own course. No treatment changes this.***
- ***Coughing and wheezing are the main symptoms.***
- ***Most children do not need any specific treatment.***
- ***Those who need admission to hospital are at risk for repeated episodes of wheezing.***
- ***There is no treatment that changes the course of the illness.***
- ***Admission to hospital will be for oxygen or fluid replacement if the child is not feeding well.***

This information provides a general overview on Bronchiolitis and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject.

