Respiratory Conditions
Sometimes, all you need is the air that you breathe.

Sounds simple, doesn’t it? For sufferers of respiratory problems, breathing doesn’t come easy. Pollen, dust, smoke, mold, and other air-borne particles can make breathing a real chore.

About Respiratory Conditions
Allergies and bronchitis are respiratory conditions that affect millions of Americans each year. In this section we’ll learn when to employ self-care techniques, and when to contact a healthcare provider.

Allergies—an overreaction of the immune system to a normally harmless substance in the environment (called an allergen).

Bronchitis—an inflammation of the bronchial tubes leading to the lungs. Oftentimes, bronchitis appears within three to four days after an upper respiratory infection like a cold or the flu.

When To Seek Care
For Respiratory Conditions
Though most respiratory conditions are typically mild, they can become very serious, requiring the assistance of a healthcare professional. The following are symptoms that mean you should seek medical care immediately.

Allergies
+ If you have signs of anaphylactic shock, see a doctor immediately. Symptoms include hives all over the body, shortness of breath, tightness in the chest and/or throat, or swelling of the tongue or face.
+ If you become disoriented
+ If you become lightheaded or dizzy

Signs & Symptoms To Look Out For
Allergies and bronchitis have similar symptoms, but there are some important differences. Take a look at the symptoms for each condition and find out what you can do to find relief.

Allergies
+ Itchy, watery eyes
+ Nasal congestion
+ Frequent sneezing
+ A rash on the skin in the affected area

Bronchitis
+ A dry cough that may later produce phlegm
+ Mild fever
+ Tightness in the chest
+ Difficulty breathing and/or wheezing
Respiratory Conditions (continued)

Bronchitis

- If chest pain is crushing or feels like a heavy weight on your chest (symptoms of a possible heart attack)
- If your cough is accompanied by tightness in the chest or wheezing, or if your cough brings up green, yellow, or bloody sputum from the lungs for more than two days
- If you are having difficulty breathing, or wheezing is increasing
- If symptoms do not improve within 10 to 14 days

Treating Respiratory Conditions At Home

With proper care, most respiratory conditions can successfully be treated at home. The following are useful self-care strategies.

Allergies

- Try over-the-counter antihistamines like Claritin or Tavist.
- Use over-the-counter decongestants like Sudafed or Neo-Synephrine.
- Try breathing steam to clear nasal congestion.
- Use nonprescription nasal sprays, eye drops, and nose drops—but not for more than three days.

Bronchitis

- Humidify your environment to help ease congestion.
- Drink more fluids than usual—at least eight, 8 oz. glasses of fluid per day.
- Try an over-the-counter cough medicine for symptom relief.
- Use an over-the-counter pain reliever such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen. Adults may take aspirin (never give aspirin to a child!).

Preventing Respiratory Conditions

There are many things you can do to reduce your chances of developing bronchitis or pneumonia, or to avoid allergic reactions. Take a look at some of the tips below.

Allergies

- Know your allergy triggers—like pet dander, pollen, or latex for example—and, if possible, avoid them.
- Keep your house and car windows closed.
- Don't smoke.
- Try using a HEPA filter on your air conditioner or air purifier (HEPA filters can reduce impurities in the air).

Bronchitis

- Get a flu shot. Bronchitis and pneumonia can develop on the heels of a cold or the flu.
- Stop smoking. Smoking is by far the most common cause of chronic bronchitis.
- Get plenty of rest and increase your level of physical activity.

A Self-Care Essential

Get Treated Right Away. According to the American Lung Association, those with chronic bronchitis often neglect to get professional medical treatment when necessary because they don't think bronchitis is serious. But in advanced stages, bronchitis can cause serious damage to the lungs and may lead to heart failure. If you experience any of the serious symptoms of bronchitis listed in this section, contact a healthcare provider right away.