

RESPIRATORY DISEASES

Example History (**D = doctor**, **P = patient**)

Can you tell me what brought you into hospital today?

Well I think I have a chest infection; I've been getting very breathless and bringing up green stuff.

Alright, has this happened to you before? Do you usually cough up something?

Yes, most of the time I cough up something every day. It's not normally green though. I usually have to go to the doctor a few times a year and get told that I have a chest infection.

I see. Tell me more about what you cough up. How much do you cough up?

I say about a cup full of clear mucus every day, usually in the morning. Like I said before, it sometimes turns green and then I go to the doctors.

Green you said? Have you ever coughed up any blood?

No, never.

You said you were breathless....Can you give me an idea of how bad the breathlessness is?

Not too bad. Usually I'm not breathless but recently I've been unable to get about myself. I've been finding it difficult to do the shopping.

And can you tell me how quickly this came on? How long ago were you your normal self?

It came on suddenly, over a few days. I was able to get about as normal last week.

Have you had any pain with that?

Yes, a little right here on my left side. It's sharp when I breathe in.

Ok, I see. Do you suffer from any wheeze at all?

Sometimes I get a bit wheezy but only when my breathlessness is really bad.

And are you on any medication?

I sometimes take paracetamol for pain – but not often. I have a blue inhaler (salbutamol) for my chest but nothing else regularly. I've been taking antibiotics and steroids whilst in hospital.

Ok, I see. Do you have any other health problems, either now or in the past?

No, just the chest infections in the past.

Any health problems that run in the family?

No, not that I'm aware. My mother has angina.

Ok, and do you smoke? Drink alcohol? Take drugs?

Yes, I do smoke. I have done for the past 20 years – about one full pack per day. I don't drink much – just the odd glass of wine and drugs have never interested me; I've avoided them.

Ok, and do you have any worries about your health? What do you feel about your condition?

On the whole, it doesn't bother me, but I'm afraid it will get worse. I know smoking is bad and cancer is a worry – I've tried to give up in the past but I just find it really difficult. At the moment though, my health doesn't really bother me – just the odd chest infection. I just don't want to end up like my mother who needs the doctors a lot.

I see, well let's talk about that...

Case summary

Here we have a 55yr old woman who presented to hospital with increasing shortness of breath and a change in character of her usual smoker's cough. She reports coughing more frequently and a change in the character of her sputum which has changed from clear, serous fluid to a thick green mucus over the past few days. This has been accompanied by a right sided pleuritic chest pain. Normally, she would cough up about half a cup of clear fluid in the morning. She takes salbutamol for breathlessness when it gets bad, but reports not taking anything regularly. She has not coughed up any blood.

She has smoked 20 cigarettes per day for the last 20 years (20 pack year) and has the occasional glass of wine. There is no relevant family history.

Based on the history, this woman has presented with a lower respiratory tract infection on a background of bronchiectasis.