

BYSSINOSIS

INTRODUCTION

Byssinosis is a disease of the lungs brought on by breathing in cotton dust or dusts from other vegetable fibers such as flax, hemp, or sisal while at work. It is most common in people who work in the textile industry. Those who are sensitive to the dust can have an asthma like condition after being exposed.

SYMPTOMS

Byssinosis may cause wheezing, cough and tightness in the chest, usually on the first day of work after a break. Symptoms will get worse at the beginning of the work week, and then improve while patient are away from the workplace, or later in the work week. Prolonged exposure to cotton dust increases the frequency of symptoms (wheezing, chest tightness) and leads to permanent lung disease, which can sometimes be disabling.

SIGNS AND TESTS

Health care provider will take a detailed medical history, and will ask many questions to try to find out whether symptoms relate to certain exposures or times of exposure.

The health care provider will also do a physical exam, with special attention to the lungs. Other tests

include: Chest x-ray and Pulmonary function tests.

PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

Controlling dust, using face masks, and other measures can reduce the risk and is the best way to prevent byssinosis. Workers with symptoms who also experience sudden drops in lung function on the first day of the workweek should be removed from exposure. Wheezing and chest tightness can be treated with the drugs used for asthma. Drugs that open the airways (bronchodilators) may be given. Corticosteroids may be prescribed in more severe cases. Stopping smoking is very important for people with this condition. Respiratory treatments, including nebulizers, may be prescribed if the condition becomes chronic. Home oxygen therapy may also be needed if blood oxygen levels are low. Physical exercise programs, breathing exercises, and patient education programs

are often very helpful for people with a chronic lung disease.