

Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome



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Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome

Acute respiratory distress syndrome (known as ARDS) is a serious injury to the lungs. It is caused by:

- breathing anything other than clean air (such as vomit, harmful fumes, or smoke)
- infection (such as pneumonia)
- trauma (such as a car accident)
- reaction to a blood transfusion.

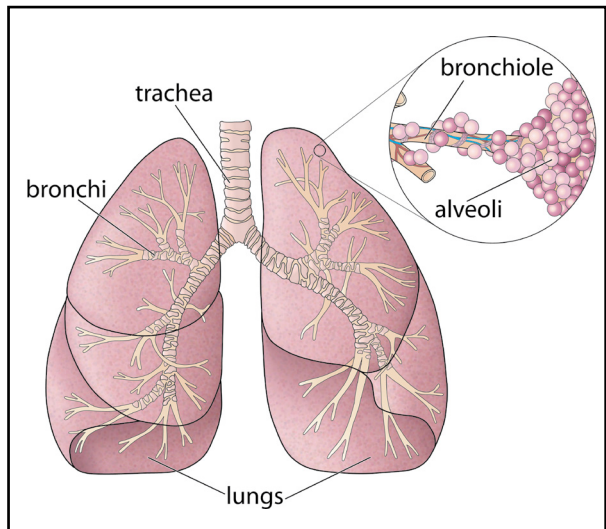
It is a life-threatening condition.

Your Lungs

Your lungs bring air (oxygen) into your body as you breathe in and get rid of carbon dioxide as you breathe out.

Tiny air sacs (alveoli) are filled with oxygen. The blood vessels around them move the oxygen through your bloodstream.

ARDS causes the air sacs to fill with fluid and become heavy, like a wet sponge. This keeps the oxygen from getting into your body.



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Your lungs have small air sacs called alveoli.

Symptoms of ARDS

Symptoms may start quickly. Your loved one may have:

- extra sputum or secretions in their mouth
- problems breathing
- fever
- cough.

If your loved one has any of the above symptoms, call 911 or take them to the nearest hospital Emergency Department.

Confirming ARDS

The health care team will:

- take a chest X-ray
- take blood to check the amount of oxygen
- take blood to check for infection
- take a CT scan of the lungs
- do other tests as needed.

Treating ARDS

Your loved one will be cared for in the Intensive Care Unit.

■ **Breathing machine (ventilator):**

Your loved one will be connected to a breathing machine. A tube is attached to one end of the breathing machine. The other end of the tube is placed down your loved one's windpipe.

The breathing machine can help your loved one breathe or do all of the breathing for them. The health care team can adjust how much oxygen your loved one receives.

By getting more oxygen than normal, this will help your loved one's lungs heal.

■ Medicines:

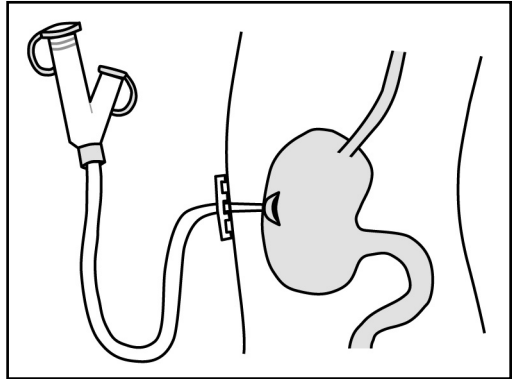
Your loved one will receive many medicines. They will be given through the intravenous (IV) tube in their hand.

- antibiotics: to treat infection caused by bacteria (germs)
- muscle relaxers: to keep your loved one from moving so they don't need as much oxygen
- blood pressure: your loved one may need their blood pressure to go up
- pain relief
- medicine for the lungs to help more blood flow into the air sacs. This puts more oxygen into the bloodstream.

■ Feeding tube:

Your loved one will not be able to eat or drink. They will be fed through a tube in their arm, neck or chest.

If your loved one has a tracheostomy (see the next section) and needs to be on a breathing machine, they will need surgery to place the tube right into the stomach. This surgery is called a PEG (percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy).



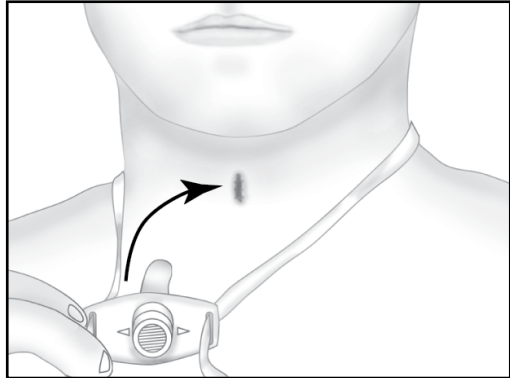
Source: National institutes of Health

The feeding tube will be placed right into the stomach wall.

■ Tracheostomy:

If your loved one has needed the support of a breathing machine for more than 2 weeks, they need to have a tracheostomy.

During this procedure, a tube is placed through a small opening in the neck. This opening goes right to the windpipe. Oxygen can be delivered into the tube.



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The tracheostomy can stay in as long as needed and is more comfortable. The tube in your loved one's mouth will then be taken out.

A tracheostomy lets your loved one get oxygen. It is more comfortable than the breathing machine tube.

Your Loved One's Recovery

Recovery from ARDS can take many weeks or months. It can even take up to 1 year.

Some people heal quickly can have the breathing machine taken out in a week. Other people may need the breathing machine for many weeks or months.

People who recover may not be able to breathe as well as before the ARDS for 12 months or longer. Scar tissue often forms on the lungs.

People who recover from ARDS will not be the same as before.

What You Can Do to Help

- Provide support and comfort to your loved one.
 - Talk to them.
 - Hold their hand.
 - Play calming music.
 - Bring in personal items, such as family photos or cards.
- Ask questions. Write them down as you think of them and ask your health care team at any time.
- Ask someone to be the spokesperson for your family. This person could be contacted by the health care team.
- Ask another family member or friend to help give updates to the rest of the family or friends.
- Take care of yourself.
 - Take breaks often. Rest periods for your loved one are good times for you to get some exercise, food or rest.
 - Get enough rest.
 - Eat healthful foods.



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