What Is a Pleural Effusion?

The body produces small amounts of fluid to keep the linings around the lungs slippery. One lining surrounds the lung, and another lines the chest cavity. These thin layers of tissue are called the pleural linings. The area between the two linings is called the pleural space. When too much fluid builds up in this space, it is called a pleural effusion.

What Causes a Pleural Effusion?

- Blocked blood vessels or lymph vessels
- Cancer
- Congestive heart failure
- Inflammation or infection
- Lung injury

What Are the Symptoms?

- Chest pain
- Cough
- Fever
- Hiccups
- Rapid breathing
- Shortness of breath

How Is a Pleural Effusion Treated?

Treatment for a pleural effusion has several goals:

- Remove the excess fluid
- Find and treat the cause of the fluid buildup
- Prevent fluid from building up again

The type of treatment depends on the cause of the fluid buildup. Small tubes may be placed to drain the fluid for longer-term relief. Sometimes doctors use a needle to draw out the fluid (called a thoracentesis). Some patients need medicines that increase urination. This helps remove extra fluid from the body.

What Are the Possible Complications?

- Air in the chest cavity
- Infection that turns into an abscess
- Lung damage

When to Call Your Doctor

- Call if you have symptoms of a pleural effusion.
- Call ____________________ or go to the emergency room if you feel short of breath or have difficulty breathing after treatment for a pleural effusion.