



Asbestosis

[Asbestosis](#) is caused by inhalation of [asbestos](#) fibers. Unlike other forms of [asbestos disease](#), such as [mesothelioma](#), asbestosis is not cancerous. The process of getting asbestosis is not yet fully understood, but it seems that asbestos fibers in the lungs cause irritation and inflammation. The body attempts to defend itself from these foreign fibers in various complex ways, and some or all of these defense mechanisms lead to further inflammation and cell damage. Eventually a fibrosis (excessive fibrous connective tissue) or scar tissue develops in the small narrow spaces around the airways and alveoli (air sacs in the lung). The thickening and scarring prevents oxygen and carbon dioxide from traveling between the alveoli and the blood cells, so breathing becomes much more difficult.



Asbestosis often exists without any symptoms, and is found only by x-ray findings. The symptoms that do exist typically include shortness of breath and coughing, which are often mistaken to have other causes. As the disease progresses the symptoms can worsen. Asbestosis can be a progressive disease, meaning that it continues to develop even after exposure to asbestos has stopped. Though unusual, asbestosis can be fatal.

Only x-rays and CT scans can show scarring and thickening of lung tissue. If the scar tissue reduces the functioning of the lungs, asbestosis can also be detected by a breathing or pulmonary function test (PFT). Diagnosis can be made when there is a [history of asbestos](#) exposure and positive results from chest x-rays or CT scans. A clinical exam, a pulmonary function test and/or other clinical findings can aid in the diagnosis. It can be conclusively determined that asbestosis exists through a biopsy.

Asbestosis is bilateral, meaning that it affects both lungs. It is mainly in the lower fields of the lungs, but it usually diffuses to be widespread.

Asbestosis is caused by exposure to asbestos. Those who had sustained exposure over a period of years or intense exposure during a shorter a period are at risk for developing asbestosis. Not everyone who has been exposed to asbestos gets asbestosis, but it has been found that everyone who has gotten asbestosis was exposed to asbestos fibers.

The specific type of asbestos fiber that the worker was exposed to does not seem to be significant in the development of asbestosis. At the moment there is no cure or effective treatment for asbestosis. People who have asbestosis are also at high risk for developing lung cancer or mesothelioma.