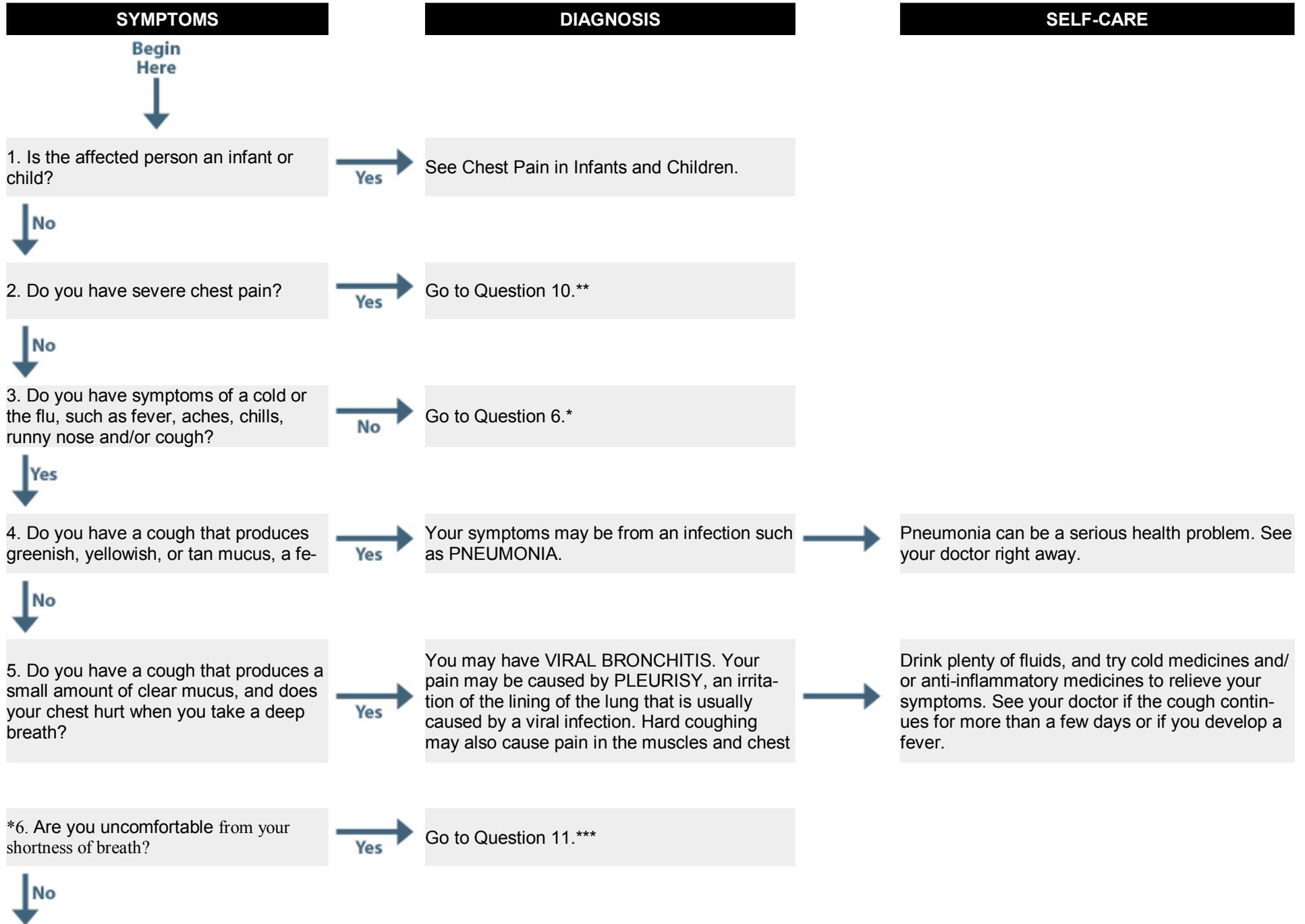


Chest Pain, Acute

Severe, sudden chest pain can represent a life-threatening problem. Follow this chart for more information.



7. Do you have a sharp pain on one side of your chest when you take a deep breath?

Yes

Your pain may indicate PNEUMOTHORAX, a condition in which air leaks from a lung and fills the chest cavity. This makes it difficult to breathe.

See your doctor right away. Treatment of pneumothorax may require hospitalization.

No

8. Do you experience shortness of breath when you are physically active and/or when you're lying down?

Yes

You may have a serious problem, such as CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE, ASTHMA or PULMONARY EDEMA

See your doctor right away.

No

9. Do you have pressure in your chest, shortness of breath and numbness around your lips or in your hands or feet?

Yes

These could be symptoms of HYPERVENTILATION, an episode of overbreathing often caused by stress or anxiety.

IF YOU HAVE A HEART PROBLEM, LUNG CONDITION, ASTHMA, OR IF YOU'RE EXPERIENCING RAPID BREATHING FOR THE FIRST TIME, GO DIRECTLY TO THE HOSPITAL.

If you have hyperventilated before due to stress or anxiety, your doctor may have given you information about treating yourself. Lie down, relax and try to slow your breathing. Try breathing through pursed lips (as if you were whistling), or cover your mouth and one nostril, and breathe through the other nostril.

No

****10. Do you have any of the following symptoms?**

- Crushing pain or uncomfortable pressure in the middle of your chest that lasts more than a few minutes
- Squeezing pain in the chest or left upper arm
- Sweating and nausea
- Severe shortness of breath

Yes

Your pain may be from a HEART ATTACK or MYOCARDIAL INFARCTION. Note: Just like for men, chest pain is the most common heart attack symptom in women. However, women are more likely than men to experience the following symptoms (with or without chest pain) when having a heart attack: abdominal pain, feeling lightheaded or dizzy, back or jaw pain, and unexplained fatigue.

**EMERGENCY.
CALL AN AMBULANCE RIGHT AWAY.**

No

***11. Does the pain or discomfort occur only when you swallow or after you eat?

Yes

Your pain may be from an irritation of the stomach called GASTRITIS or an irritation of the esophagus called ESOPHAGITIS. A HIATAL HERNIA (a weakness in the diaphragm) or esophageal spasms may also cause this type of pain and discomfort.

Try an antacid, and eat smaller, less spicy meals. See your doctor if the problem persists.

No

12. Do you have a painful, blistering rash on your chest or back?

Yes

You may have a viral infection of the nerves and skin called SHINGLES.

See your doctor. Shingles usually clears on its own, but medication may ease the pain and help prevent complications.

No

13. Do you have back pain that radiates around to the front of your chest?

Yes

Your pain may be from a compressed nerve, possibly from a COMPRESSION FRACTURE.

See your doctor promptly.

No

For more information, please talk to your doctor. If you think your problem is serious, call right away.

This tool has been reviewed by doctors and is for general educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for medical advice. The information in this tool should not be relied upon to make decisions about your health. Always consult your family doctor with questions about your individual condition(s) and/or circumstances. Source: American Academy of Family Physicians. Family Health & Medical Guide. Dallas: Word Publishing; 1996.