

Marcia O'Bryan

NON-TUBERCULOUS MYCOBACTERIAL
PULMONARY DISEASE (NTM)



Living with NTM is not easy, but it is possible. Originally, I was diagnosed with asthma. I didn't think I had asthma, so I asked my doctor for a CT scan and a sputum test, just to be sure. After he did these tests, he agreed with me. I didn't have asthma. I had bronchiectasis and non-tuberculous mycobacterial pulmonary disease, NTM.

With my diagnosis came a severe cough and fatigue so extreme that it made it difficult to get out of bed. My routines changed. For example, showers are no longer a good idea because of germs in the showerheads, so I take baths instead. I use nasal washes daily, and every morning I put on my vest.

My vest isn't your ordinary, go-to-work vest. It has hoses and Velcro, and it helps to get mucous out of my lungs. It's an important part of my lung hygiene process, which also includes nebulizers and other gadgets to help loosen the mucous and allow it to be coughed out. It's a good thing, but it is time consuming and tiring.

*Marcia O'Bryan was a patient speaker at the
ATS 2018 International Conference in San Diego,
California.*

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These routines take several hours every day and are very important. Additionally, I use oxygen, have a picc-line for IV antibiotics and take three antibiotics by mouth, sometimes for months at a time. I've also had a lobe of my lung removed.

Other routines have changed, too. While I've had to stop kayaking and mountain biking, I've found new activities I enjoy, such as learning to play the piano. Living with NTM is not easy, but until there is a cure for this stubborn disease, I will live my life to the fullest. ■

Nontuberculous Mycobacteria (NTM)

Nontuberculous Mycobacteria (NTM) are bacteria that are normally present in the environment. NTM comprise more than 160 different species of bacteria that are found naturally in the environment. Inhalation of these bacteria may cause disease in both healthy patients and those with compromised immune systems. NTM disease most often affects the lungs in adults, but it may also affect any body site. NTM pulmonary disease causes symptoms similar to a chronic and non-resolving pneumonia. Common symptoms include:

- Shortness of breath.
- Cough (often with white or pink frothy sputum).
- Fatigue.
- Fever.
- Abdominal pain (in pancreatitis).

Learn more: ATS Patient Education Series. "What is Nontuberculous Mycobacteria (NTM) Disease?" New York, NY. www.thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/ntm.pdf