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Cough, What Causes Cough

What Is A Cough?



[caption id="" align="alignleft" width="167" caption="A Boy Coughing" /caption]

When you cough, it means your body is trying to clear its air passages of something that is blocking or irritating them. The culprit can be dust, smoke or a piece of lodged food.

Often, though, a cough is the result of a viral infection such as a cold, which inflames the upper part of our breathing apparatus. This encourages the production of sticky mucus, which drips down the back of the nose and throat.

If your cough is caused by a bacterial infection, you may need to go to a doctor for treatment with antibiotics. Otherwise, there are treatments available from the pharmacist for every type of minor cough.

How Do I Know If I Have A Cough?

Coughs divide into two main types: 'productive' or chesty coughs, which bring up mucus or phlegm into your mouth; and dry ('unproductive') coughs, which do not bring up any phlegm and are felt as a persistent tickling at the back of your throat.

Before you buy a cough remedy from your local pharmacist, it is important that you recognise which kind of cough you have. Using the wrong product could do you more harm than good. If you have a heavy cough or are finding it difficult to breathe, you should see a doctor.

Coughing can also be a nervous reaction to stress, particularly in children.

What Can I Do Immediately To Make My Cough Better?

- * Stop your throat from drying out by having plenty to drink. A dry atmosphere or abrupt changes in temperature may also make your cough worse.
- * Stay away from smoky rooms and do not smoke yourself.
- * You can soothe your cough by sucking a boiled sweet or throat lozenge, or making yourself a hot drink of lemon and honey.
- * Prop up your head at night with extra pillows or by raising the mattress at one end.
- * Breathing in steam from a bowl of hot water may help. You can also buy inhalation treatments that contain natural oils such as eucalyptus.
- * Try to bring up mucus if you have a productive cough.
- * Ask your pharmacist to recommend a suitable cough medicine.

What can I do generally to stop my cough from getting worse?

- * Give up smoking. Your pharmacist or doctor will advise you about products that can help you quit.
- * Make sure you cover your mouth with your hand when coughing, to avoid passing on infection.

What Treatments Can I Buy Without A Prescription?

There is a huge range of products available to treat cough symptoms, including special mixtures for children. Most cough remedies are syrups or other liquids containing either expectorants, which make it easier to cough up phlegm, or suppressants, which act on the part of the brain that makes us cough.

You should take an expectorant for a chesty ('productive') cough and a suppressant for a dry cough. Do not take a suppressant if you have a chesty cough, as this may prevent you from bringing up phlegm.

Ask your pharmacist which medicine is right for you. Cough suppressants can make you feel drowsy, so be careful about driving or operating machinery. They should also be avoided if you have asthma or chronic bronchitis.

When Do I Need To See A Doctor?

- * If you are coughing up blood with your mucus.
- * If you are consistently bringing up thick, green, yellow, grey or foul-smelling phlegm.
- * If your cough carries on for more than two weeks or starts to get worse.
- * If you have a cough and high temperature for more than five days (three days for a child).
- * If coughing makes you wheezy or short of breath.
- * If you are getting a sharp pain in your chest when you cough or breathe in.
- * If a child with a cough is dribbling and cannot swallow.

You should contact a doctor immediately if:

- * You are panting or generally having difficulty breathing.
- * If your breathing is rapid or painful.
- * If your child's lips have a bluish tinge.

In summary ...

- * Stay away from dry or smoky environments.
- * Soothe your throat with a hot honey and lemon drink.
- * Work out which kind of cough you have and ask your pharmacist for the right treatment.
- * Go to the doctor if your symptoms are severe or you are having problems breathing.

By Peter Mansell.

[Free medical advice online](#) presented by [Vivienne Balonwu](#).

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