

Cough, Adult

Coughing is a reflex that clears your throat and your airways (*respiratory system*). Coughing helps to heal and protect your lungs. It is normal to cough occasionally, but a cough that happens with other symptoms or lasts a long time may be a sign of a condition that needs treatment. An acute cough may last only 2–3 weeks, while a chronic cough may last 8 or more weeks.

What are the causes?

Coughing is commonly caused by:

- Infection of the respiratory system by viruses or bacteria.
- Breathing in substances that irritate your lungs.
- Allergies.
- Asthma.
- Mucus that runs down the back of your throat (*postnasal drip*).
- Smoking.
- Acid backing up from the stomach into the esophagus (*gastroesophageal reflux*).
- Certain medicines.
- Chronic lung problems.
- Other medical conditions such as heart failure or a blood clot in the lung (*pulmonary embolism*).

Follow these instructions at home:

Medicines

- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider.
- Talk with your health care provider before you take a cough suppressant medicine.

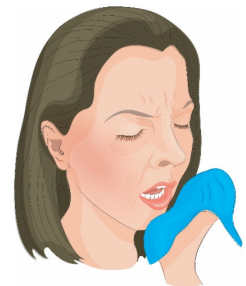
Lifestyle

- Avoid cigarette smoke. **Do not** use any products that contain nicotine or tobacco, such as cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and chewing tobacco. If you need help quitting, ask your health care provider.
- Drink enough fluid to keep your urine pale yellow.
- Avoid caffeine.
- **Do not** drink alcohol if your health care provider tells you not to drink.



General instructions

- Pay close attention to changes in your cough. Tell your health care provider about them.
- Always cover your mouth when you cough.
- Avoid things that make you cough, such as perfume, candles, cleaning products, or campfire or tobacco smoke.
- If the air is dry, use a cool mist vaporizer or humidifier in your bedroom or your home to help loosen secretions.
- If your cough is worse at night, try to sleep in a semi-upright position.
- Rest as needed.
- Keep all follow-up visits as told by your health care provider. This is important.



Contact a health care provider if you:

- Have new symptoms.
- Cough up pus.
- Have a cough that does not get better after 2–3 weeks or gets worse.
- Cannot control your cough with cough suppressant medicines and you are losing sleep.
- Have pain that gets worse or pain that is not helped with medicine.
- Have a fever.
- Have unexplained weight loss.
- Have night sweats.

Get help right away if:

- You cough up blood.
- You have difficulty breathing.
- Your heartbeat is very fast.

These symptoms may represent a serious problem that is an emergency. Do not wait to see if the symptoms will go away. Get medical help right away. Call your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.). Do not drive yourself to the hospital.

Summary

- Coughing is a reflex that clears your throat and your airways. It is normal to cough occasionally, but a cough that happens with other symptoms or lasts a long time may be a sign of a condition that needs treatment.
- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider.
- Always cover your mouth when you cough.
- Contact a health care provider if you have new symptoms or a cough that does not get better after 2–3 weeks or gets worse.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.