



A **cough** is a reflex action. It clears the lungs and airways of irritants, mucus, a foreign body, etc.

Signs & Symptoms

There are 3 kinds of Coughs

- **Productive.** This cough brings up mucus or phlegm.
- **Nonproductive.** This cough is dry. It doesn't bring up any mucus.
- **Reflex.** This cough is from a problem somewhere else like the ear or stomach.

Treatment

How to treat a cough depends on what kind it is, what caused it, and other symptoms. Treat the cause and soothe the irritation. Self-care can treat most coughs. If the cause is due to a medical condition, treatment for that condition is needed.

Coughs

Causes

- Tobacco smoke. Dry air.
- **Asthma.** (See at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- An allergy or an infection.
- Acid reflux from the stomach. (See **Heartburn & Indigestion** at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- Certain medications, like ACE inhibitors for high blood pressure.
- Something stuck in the windpipe.
- A collapsed lung.
- A growth or tumor in the bronchial tubes or lungs.

Questions to Ask

With a cough, do any of these problems occur?

- A very hard time breathing.
- Chest pain that spreads to the neck, arm, tooth, or jaw.
- Sudden, severe pain in the chest wall followed by a cough and breathlessness without pain.
- Fainting.
- Coughing up true red blood.
- Fever of 100.4°F or higher in a baby less than 3 months old; 104°F or higher in a child between 3 months and 3 years old.
- The cough persists after an episode of choking on food or a foreign object.



NO

In a child, does the cough occur with one or more of these problems?

- Rapid breathing.
- Fever of 99.5°F and up to 100.4°F in an infant less than 3 months old; between 102.2°F and up to 104°F in a child 3 months to 3 years old; 104°F or higher in a child 3 years old and older.
- The cough sounds like a seal's bark.



NO

Flowchart continued on next page



Coughs, Continued

Did the cough start suddenly and last an hour or more without stopping? Or, do wheezing, shortness of breath, rapid breathing, or swelling of the abdomen, legs, and ankles occur with the cough?

NO

With a cough in an adult, is a fever of 102°F or higher present?

NO

With a cough, do you have weight loss for no reason, fatigue, and/or sweating a lot at night?

NO

Does your chest hurt only when you cough and does the pain go away when you sit up or lean forward?

NO

Do you cough up green, yellow, or bloody-colored mucus, with or without an odor?

NO

Has the cough lasted more than 2 weeks without getting better?

NO



YES



YES



YES



YES



YES



- Use an over-the-counter expectorant medicine, as directed. This helps you spit out phlegm or mucus. Try a decongestant for postnasal drip. {**Note:** See information on “Decongestant” use and “Expectorant” use at www.HealthyLearn.com.}

For Coughs that Are Dry

- Drink lots of liquids. Hot drinks like tea with lemon and honey soothe the throat.
- Suck on cough drops or hard candy. (Don’t give these to children under age 5.)
- Take an over-the-counter cough medicine that has dextromethorphan. {**Note:** See information on “Cough Suppressant” use at www.HealthyLearn.com.}
- Make your own cough medicine. Mix 1 part lemon juice and 2 parts honey. (Don’t give this to children less than 1 year old.)

Other Tips

- Don’t smoke. Avoid secondhand smoke. Avoid chemical gases that can hurt your lungs.
- Don’t give children under age 5 small objects that can easily get caught in the throat or windpipe. Examples are buttons, balloons, peanuts, and popcorn. Even adults should be careful to chew and swallow foods slowly so they don’t “go down the wrong way.”
- If you cough and have heartburn symptoms when you lie down, try a liquid antacid. Don’t lie down for 2 to 3 hours after you eat.

Self-Care / Prevention

For Coughs that Bring Up Mucus

- Drink plenty of liquids.
- Don’t smoke. Avoid secondhand smoke.
- Use a cool-mist vaporizer, especially in the bedroom. Put a humidifier on the furnace.
- Take a shower. The steam helps thin mucus.



Get more information from:

HealthyLearn® • www.HealthyLearn.com

American Lung Association

800.LUNG.USA (586.4872) • www.lungusa.org