Cough

The body has a normal cough reflex. This helps expel mucous secretions and irritants from the lung and airway. Coughing helps to protect you from pneumonia. Most coughs are caused by virus infections. These often take 2 to 3 weeks to clear up. Cough spasms are periods of continuous coughing that go on for several minutes. If a cough can be controlled with medicine, and it clears up in 2 to 3 weeks, no special studies or treatment is usually needed.

A persistent cough lasting longer than 3 to 4 weeks requires medical evaluation. X-rays and other tests may be needed to determine the cause. A chronic cough is most often due to smoking, post-nasal drip from sinus disease, or asthma. Esophageal reflux disease or GERD can also lead to a chronic cough. ACE inhibitor blood pressure drugs may also cause a cough. Some infections like whooping cough can cause a persistent cough that lasts for weeks.

Treatment of cough includes measures to loosen the cough and thin the mucus. Warm liquids, cough drops, and non prescription cough medicine will help reduce dry hacking cough. Use a humidifier if necessary to moisten the air in your room. Some cough medicines also have antihistamines, decongestants, or alcohol in them, but there is no proof that any of these help control cough.

Cough suppressants may be used as directed by your caregiver. Keep in mind that coughing helps clear mucus and infection out of the respiratory tract. It is best to use cough suppressants only when rest is needed. For children under the age of 4 years, use cough suppressants **only** as directed by your child's caregiver.

Prescription cough medicine or those with dextromethorphan (DM) should be reserved for dry coughs that prevent sleep or cause spasms or chest pain. Avoid any exposure to cigarette smoke because this will worsen the cough or make it last much longer.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU OR YOUR CHILD DEVELOPS:

- Increased difficulty breathing.
- A high fever or severe chest pain.
- A cough which has not improved within 3 weeks.

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