Hiccups, Hiccoughs

Hiccups (also spelled hiccoughs) are caused by a sudden contraction of the muscles between the ribs and the muscle under your lungs (*diaphragm*). When you hiccup, the top of your windpipe (*glottis*) closes immediately after your diaphragm contracts. This makes the typical 'hic' sound. A hiccup is a reflex that you cannot stop. Unlike other reflexes such as coughing and sneezing, hiccups do not seem to have any useful purpose. There are three types of hiccups:

- Benign bouts: last less than 48 hours.
- Persistent: last more than 48 hours but less than one month.
- Intractable: last more than one month.

CAUSES

Most people have bouts of hiccups from time to time. They start for no apparent reason, last a short while, and then stop. Sometimes they are due to:

- A temporary swollen stomach caused by overeating or eating too fast, drinking fizzy drinks, or swallowing air.
- A sudden change in temperature (very hot or cold foods or drinks, a cold shower, etc).
- Drinking alcohol.
- Excess smoking.
- Sudden excitement or emotional stress.

Persistent and intractable hiccups are uncommon. Persistent hiccups can become exhausting and distressing. Persistent hiccups can be caused by an underlying disease. Over 100 diseases have been reported to cause persistent or intractable hiccups. Some are common, such as acid reflux and heartburn, and some are very rare. In many cases, there is no apparent cause.

TREATMENT

- Most cases need no treatment as a bout of benign hiccups usually doesn't last long.
- Medicine is sometimes needed to stop persistent hiccups. Medicine may be given intravenously (IV) or by mouth.
- Hypnosis or acupuncture may be suggested.
- Surgery to affect the nerve that supplies the diaphragm may be tried in severe cases.
- Treatment of an underlying cause is needed in some cases.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Popular remedies that may stop a bout of hiccups include:
  - Gargling ice water.
  - Swallowing granulated sugar.
  - Biting on a lemon.
  - Holding your breath, breathing fast, or breathing into a paper bag.
  - Bearing down.
  - Gasping after a sudden fright.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Hiccups last more than 48 hours.
- Hiccups that do not get better with medicine.
- New symptoms show up.
- You cannot sleep or eat due to the hiccups.

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