

COUGHING

Most coughs are caused by viruses and it is your body's way of clearing your airways. When your throat is irritated by something, you may get a dry or tickly cough.

Other symptoms may develop and include: fever, headache, aches and pains. Cold symptoms may occur if the infection also affects the nose. Symptoms typically peak after 2-3 days, and then gradually clear. However, the cough may persist for up to 4 weeks after the infection has gone. This is because the inflammation in the airways caused by the infection can take a while to clear. If you smoke the cough may take longer to clear.

An average primary school child has 3-8 coughs or colds per year. Sometimes several coughs or colds occur one after the other.

SELF CARE: What you can do for yourself

Suck a 'boiled' sweet or sip hot 'honey and lemon' drinks. This will give a temporary relief. Don't smoke. Avoid smoky rooms. (Avoid smoking near children). Put your hand over your mouth when you cough and tell your children to do the same. Use extra pillows at night. With babies and children, raise the head of the bed or mattress by 4in (10cm). Try steam inhalation: breathe in steam from a bowl of hot water. For children make the bathroom steamy and sit with them for 5 minutes. (The bathroom should be as steamy as a Turkish bath). Applying menthol (ie. vicks vaporub or olbas oil) on the chest or under the nose can reduce coughing when trying to sleep at night.

Sometimes there maybe a temperature associated with the cough/cold. Try decreasing the temperature with paracetamol or ibuprofen. If the temperature is not coming down or persists then consult your Doctor.

Antibiotics are not usually advised.

Antibiotics do not kill viruses - they only kill bacteria. Antibiotics do not usually ease a cough caused by a virus. They may even make symptoms worse as they sometimes cause side-effects such as diarrhoea, feeling sick, and rashes

Contact your doctor:

- if you cough up mucus with blood in it
- if your breathing is painful, wheezy, loud, or if you are short of breath.
- if your cough lasts more than 2 weeks
- if you have a high temperature and a cough and this goes on for more than 5 days.

Children:

All the above reasons and:

- if your child has a high temperature and appears unwell
- if your child has acute problems with his/her breathing which you can't understand
- if your child's breathing is very fast and this makes him/her pant

Contact your doctor immediately:

- if your breathing is painful/if you have chest pain
- if your child's breathing is very fast or the child is using a lot of effort to breathe/grunting
- If you notice that your child's lips are bluish in colour
- If you are a known asthmatic and are not improving on your usual medication