Cough Treatment

Self-Care at Home

Home care of the cough is often directed at treating its underlying cause.

- If you have an acute cough and have not been to the doctor, you may attempt to use over-the-counter cold remedies to relieve your symptoms. If a common cold or flu is suspected, these may provide relief until the infection gets better on its own. Acute coughs that are caused by allergies are often relieved with allergy medication, and coughs due to environmental irritants will respond to elimination of the agent.
- Home care of the chronic cough with a known cause is directed at treating the underlying cause of the cough. This should be done in close consultation with your doctor or with a specialist. Although not every chronic cough can be eliminated, many people can find relief of their cough by following their doctor's recommendations closely.

Medical Treatment

The treatment of a cough will depend largely on its severity and underlying cause.

- The treatment of an acute cough is directed primarily at decreasing the cough in addition to treating the underlying cause.
- Symptomatic relief of cough can be provided by over-the-counter or prescription cough remedies.
- Severe coughs or coughs that interfere with sleep may need remedies that include narcotic medications. If these are prescribed, take care to avoid alcohol, driving, and operating any heavy machinery while using the medication.
- If a bacterial infection is suspected the doctor will often prescribe antibiotics. People who are suspected of having a viral infection will not benefit from antibiotics and will receive treatments directed at their symptoms only.
- Elderly people, people with very severe bacterial or viral infections, and people with weakened immune systems may require admission to the hospital to manage the underlying problem.
The treatment of a chronic cough will also be directed at treating the underlying condition. It is important to recognize that treatment may be difficult, may employ multiple approaches, and may not completely eliminate the cough.

If you have a cough caused by smoking, allergies, or environmental irritants, you will benefit from elimination of the offending substance. It may take several weeks for the doctor to assess the response to this approach because of the length of time required to repair damage to the lungs and air passages from the offending agent.

If you have a lung disease, you will often need ongoing therapy to treat your condition. Therapies used will depend largely on the type of disease present. Multiple treatments are often used at the same time to help reduce symptoms. Careful adherence with the treatment selected will be critical to help slow the progression of any disease and to reduce symptoms. In cases where home therapy fails and symptoms worsen, you may need hospitalization so that additional or more intensive therapies may be attempted.

If your cough is suspected to be caused by a medication, you will show improvement when the medication in question is stopped. When this occurs, the cough will likely take up to a few weeks to get better completely. Another medication may be needed to replace the one you stopped taking.

If you are suspected of having a cough caused by GERD, you will need treatment directed at reducing the amount of acid reflux from the stomach. This is typically done with diet changes and medication. Successful treatment may take time, and multiple therapies may be needed.

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