

Careful with that cough

While a cough or two is probably nothing to worry about, a prolonged cough likely needs medical attention.

The Star Malaysia · 23 Jan 2024 · 1 · By Dr LIZ HUSTED Dr Liz Husted is a family medicine physician in Wisconsin, United States.

HEARING a chorus of coughs is typical at this time of year.

Cough is your body's response when something irritates your throat or airways. An irritant stimulates nerves that send a message to your brain. The brain then tells muscles in your chest and abdomen to push air out of your lungs to force out the irritant. While an occasional cough is expected, a cough that persists may be a sign of a medical problem. At times, coughing can be very forceful. Prolonged, vigorous coughing can irritate the lungs and cause even more coughing.

- smoke, dust, chemicals or a foreign body
 - > Pneumonia, which is an infection in one or both lungs
 - > Whooping cough (pertussis).
- Some common causes for a chronic cough include:
- > Allergies
 - > Asthma
 - > Bronchitis
 - > Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
 - > Covid-19



and is not associated with any potentially worrisome symptoms. Be sure to follow the dosing instructions on the medication. To ease your cough, cough drops or hard candies may help relieve a dry cough and soothe an irritated throat. Don't give them to a child under the age of six though, due to the risk of choking. Also, consider taking a teaspoon of honey to loosen the cough.

Other ideas include:

- > Eating chicken noodle soup.
- > Getting plenty of rest.
- > Using a cool mist humidifier or taking a steamy shower to moisturise the air.
- > Drinking warm liquids, such as broth, tea or lemon juice, to soothe your throat.
- > Avoiding tobacco smoke.

Antibiotics may not be part of the treatment plan. This is as antibiotics treat bacterial infections, such as pneumonia, but they won't help viral illnesses, like colds, flu and most sore throats.

However, a cough can be a more straightforward issue. It usually indicates an irritation in the lungs or the airway. The irritation triggers the nerves that connect to our brain to tell our body to try to expel it. A cough is your body's reflex of trying to get something out that's not supposed to be there. If you have a new cough accompanying other symptoms like a runny nose and congestion, or if you're having fevers, you can consider wearing a mask and doing a Covid-19 test to ensure you're keeping those around you safe. If you have any other concerns, see your healthcare team to discuss them. Regardless, do pay attention to your cough. Although most coughs are usually minor, they can make you feel poorly. Trying the latest remedy is tempting, but the best thing you can do is to take simple steps to take care of yourself. Rest, drink fluids and keep the air around you moist. Also, remember to wash your hands frequently. - Mayo Clinic News Network/Tribune News Service

Dr Liz Husted is a family medicine physician in Wisconsin, United States.

When is a cough a concern?

While a cough or two is probably nothing to worry about, a prolonged cough likely needs medical attention.

When something irritates your throat or airways, your body usually responds by coughing in a bid to get rid of the irritant. - TNS

- An occasional cough is normal and healthy.
- A cough that persists for several weeks, or brings up discoloured or bloody mucus, may indicate a condition that needs medical attention.
- A cough is your body's response when something irritates your throat or airways.
- An irritant stimulates nerves that send a message to your brain.
- The brain then tells muscles in your chest and abdomen to push air out of your lungs to force out the irritant.
- While an occasional cough is expected, a cough that persists may be a sign of a medical problem.
- At times, coughing can be very forceful.
- Prolonged, vigorous coughing can irritate the lungs and cause even more coughing.
- It can also cause sleeplessness, dizziness or fainting, headaches, urinary incontinence, vomiting, and even broken ribs.
- A cough is considered acute if it lasts less than three weeks.

Some of the causes of an acute cough include:

- > Common cold
- > Influenza (flu)
- > Inhaling an irritant, such as smoke, dust, chemicals or a foreign body
- > Pneumonia, which is an infection in one or both lungs
- > Whooping cough (pertussis).

Some common causes for a chronic cough include:

- > Allergies
- > Asthma
- > Bronchitis
- > Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- > Covid-19 > Croup
- > Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)
- > Heart failure
- > Lung cancer
- > Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

Knowing when to see your healthcare team can be challenging.

Usually, a benign cough will be short-lived and often associated with a runny nose or cold-like symptoms.

Most of the time, those kinds of coughs will go away on their own.

Cough medicines are the most common antidote when the cough is acute, causes much discomfort, interferes with sleep, and is not associated with any potentially worrisome symptoms.

Be sure to follow the dosing instructions on the medication. To ease your cough, cough drops or hard candies may help relieve a dry cough and soothe an irritated throat.

Don't give them to a child under the age of six though, due to the risk of choking.

Also, consider taking a teaspoon of honey to loosen the cough.

Other ideas include:

- > Eating chicken noodle soup.
 - > Getting plenty of rest.
 - > Using a cool mist humidifier or taking a steamy shower to moisturise the air.
 - > Drinking warm liquids, such as broth, tea or lemon juice, to soothe your throat.
 - > Avoiding tobacco smoke.
- Antibiotics may not be part of the treatment plan. This is as antibiotics treat bacterial infections, such as pneumonia, but they won't help viral illnesses, like colds, flu and most sore throats.

Talk with your healthcare team if you start coughing up thick, green to brown sputum, along with having fevers and chills.

If you have chest pain or feel like you can't breathe, call 999 (or 112 on a mobile phone).

Most people will take a cough as a sign of a problem in your body.

However, a cough can be a more straightforward issue.

It usually indicates an irritation in the lungs or the airway.

The irritation triggers the nerves that connect to our brain to tell our body to try to expel it.

A cough is your body's reflex of trying to get something out that's not supposed to be there. If you have a new cough accompanying other symptoms like a runny nose and congestion, or if you're having fevers, you can consider wearing a mask and doing a Covid-19 test to ensure you're keeping those around you safe.

If you have any other concerns, see your healthcare team to discuss them.

Regardless, do pay attention to your cough.

Although most coughs are usually minor, they can make you feel poorly.

Trying the latest remedy is tempting, but the best thing you can do is to take simple steps to take care of yourself.

Rest, drink fluids and keep the air around you moist.

Also, remember to wash your hands frequently. – Mayo Clinic News Network/tribune News Service