

- Cough

HEALTH

SOLUTIONS

Stop a Cough in Its Tracks

Getting sick of clearing your throat? Try these expert tips.

BY ALYSSA JUNG



Coughing is annoying—especially when it comes with unpleasant stuff like a runny nose or a fever, and when it lingers after you're no longer sick.

But as bothersome as it may be, a cough is a sign that your body is taking care of you. "Coughing is a natural reflex

to protect us against aspiration [food or drink entering the airway] and clear foreign matter or mucus from the airway," says Shumon Dhar, M.D., an otolaryngologist at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

Still, you're probably eager to get rid of the hacking. Think about why you're coughing in the first place—are you getting over a cold, COVID-19, or another illness with coughing as a symptom? Or maybe environmental or pet allergies are tickling your throat—inhaled allergens and postnasal drip (when mucus trickles down the back of your throat) can trigger a cough. When you're coughing for one of these reasons, you usually improve within a few weeks or months. However, pay attention to a cough that lasts longer and doesn't stem from allergies or being sick: It may signal acid reflux, a lung condition (such as asthma, COPD, or lung cancer), or heart failure—meaning it's time to see a doctor.

It's cold and flu season, so we asked top doctors for their best tricks for taming (and eliminating!) a sickness-related cough.

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HERE'S EXACTLY WHAT TO DO...



➔ **Focus on hydration** to support your immune system's fight to get you well. And sip warm fluids like tea and bone broth; they are soothing and help break up congestion, says Raj Dasgupta, M.D., an associate professor of clinical medicine at USC Keck School of Medicine.

BOOST IT

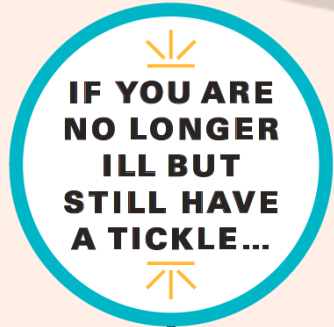
For extra soothing power, stir a little honey (regular is fine, but manuka honey is usually higher in antioxidants) into a warm liquid—it coats your throat to tame inflammation and irritation that are contributing to your cough, says Darria Long, M.D., a clinical assistant professor at the University of Tennessee School of Medicine.



➔ **"Doing a saline rinse, such as by using a neti pot,** washes out your nasal passages with salt water to quell inflammation and flush mucus away," Dr. Dasgupta says. Follow the product instructions to be sure you don't go overboard; doing this too frequently may dry out nasal passages or cause sinus problems. Taking a decongestant or an antihistamine (if you're dripping from allergies) may also help.

BOOST IT

If you're coughing at night, try this bedtime hack: "Sleep slightly sitting up in a recliner or elevate your head with pillows to reduce postnasal drip," Dr. Long says. Taking a steamy shower before bed or running a humidifier can also provide relief by keeping your airway moistened, adds Dr. Dhar.



➔ **Try training yourself to halt a cough;** after a lengthy illness, your voice box can become more sensitive to inflammation or irritants that normally wouldn't bother it, making things like exercise and talking potential triggers. "Do 30 to 60 seconds of relaxed breathing through your nose, consciously resisting the urge to cough. Also try humming and then swallowing to relax your throat," says Dr. Dhar.

BOOST IT

A stubborn cough won't go away immediately, so it's smart to cater to your throat while you work on lessening the urge to cough—sucking on ice chips or sugar-free non-menthol cough drops can provide a quick reprieve.