

COUGH

Most coughs are caused by viruses and clear up naturally fairly quickly. A cough is a reflex action to clear the throat of any foreign bodies or particles, such as dust. But when you get a cold, the infected mucus from your nose drips down the back of your throat in a process called post-nasal drip. This post-nasal drip causes a type of cough that is not helpful at all.

What are the symptoms of cough caused by a virus?

A cough generally develops over a day or so. Other symptoms can develop due to the common cold virus and include fever, headache, aches and pains. Symptoms such as a runny or blocked nose may occur if the viral infection also affects the nose. Symptoms typically peak after 2 or 3 days, and then gradually clear. However, the cough may persist for up to four weeks after the infection has gone. This is because the inflammation in the airways, caused by the infection, can take a while to clear. Scientists are not sure how long a person is contagious for when they have the cold virus. Conventional wisdom indicates that the person is contagious for about 2 weeks, starting a few days before symptoms present and peaking about 2 to 3 days after developing the first symptoms of a cold. Therefore it is important to cover your mouth with your hands or tissue when coughing or sneezing and washing your hands after to prevent the virus spreading.

Types of cough

Essentially there are two types of cough, a **DRY** or a **CHESTY** cough. Chesty coughs occur when mucus (also called phlegm or catarrh) builds up in the airways and the cough occurs so your body can clear the mucus.

Treatment options

Chesty cough mixtures such as Whelehans Special Cough Mixture contain an expectorant which liquefy the catarrh so it can be coughed up easier. Cough mixtures also soothe the back of the throat which can be irritated from the post nasal drip or the cold virus. Whelehans Special mixture has a 100 years of tradition and is non drowsy. There are other cough mixtures that cause drowsiness which can be used at night to aid sleep. Sugar free versions of cough mixtures are available for diabetics (eg) Exputex®.

Dry cough mixtures contain ingredients such as pholcodeine, codeine and dextromethorphan. Dry cough mixtures come in drowsy or non drowsy versions. Only use dry cough mixtures for dry, irritating cough without catarrh. It is important not to use dry cough mixtures if you have a chesty or productive cough as they suppress the cough reflex which is needed to clear the catarrh from your respiratory tract. It must be remembered that a cough is your body's natural mechanism for clearing bacteria and viruses through the coughing up of mucus. Therefore, suppressing this could prolong the infection. Codeine and pholcodeine cough mixtures are best avoided as they cause other troublesome problems like constipation. There are also cough mixtures available which contain decongestants which are effective if you have a congested head as well as a

cough (eg) Benylin® Dual Action for chesty or dry coughs.

When to see your doctor?

You should see your doctor if you experience any of the following symptoms with your cough:

- Phlegm which is green, yellow or rusty colour*
- Coughing up blood
- Cough lasting longer than two weeks
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain on breathing or coughing
- Unexpected loss of weight
- Regular night time cough
- Harsh barking cough in children (croup)
- Whooping sound when breathing in after a fit of coughing (whooping cough)

*A lot of people ask me what the meaning different colours of phlegm. Basically, green phlegm means a bacterial infection; yellow phlegm means a viral infection; brown or reddish phlegm can mean the presence of blood (serious sign) and clear phlegm means no infection.

Self Help

Stop smoking

If you are determined to continue smoking, at least stop for the duration of the cough. This gives the lungs an opportunity to try to clear the infection. When you stop smoking you will find you cough more for a few weeks as your lungs clear the tar that coated your lungs while you smoked.

Steam inhalations

Steam inhalations can be very useful, particularly in productive (chesty) coughs. Simply putting hot steaming water (not boiling) in a basin, putting a towel over your head and inhaling the steam can accelerate the clearing of catarrh. The steam helps to liquefy lung secretions and the warm, moist air is comforting. You can add a little eucalyptus to the steaming water for extra benefit.

Increase fluid intake

Keeping a high fluid intake helps to hydrate the lungs and hot drinks can have a soothing effect.

Prevention

As so many different viruses can cause the common cold, no vaccination against it has yet been developed. Some prevention tips are:

- Wash your hands regularly and properly, especially after touching your nose or mouth and before handling food.
- Always sneeze and cough into tissues prevent spreading infection.
- Do not share cups or kitchen utensils with others. Use your own cup, plates and cutlery.

Could your cough be due to your blood pressure medication?

A type of blood pressure medication can cause a persistent dry cough in some people. The class of drug that causes this cough is ACE inhibitors. Examples include ramipril, perindopril, and lisinopril. About 10 to 15% of people who use this class of blood pressure medication experience a dry cough. The incidence of cough appears to be higher in women. It is a persistent dry cough which is worse when lying down and generally doesn't start for 24 hours after starting an ACE inhibitor. If the dry cough occurs, the doctor will need to change to another drug. The cough will subside once you stop the drug. There are lots of other safe alternatives your doctor can prescribe if you experience this problem. Ask our pharmacist if you would like more information on high blood pressure and its treatment; there is detailed information on this topic on the Whelehans website.

Coughs in children

Coughs are more common during school term and are caused by common viruses which are commonly passed from child to child in school. While rarely serious, coughs and colds are an inconvenience and lead to many missed school days. Some prevention tips help prevent coughs and colds. Examples include ensuring your child wash their hands regularly and properly, especially after touching their nose or mouth and before handling food. Teach them to always sneeze and cough into tissues prevent spreading infection. Sharing unwashed cups and utensils is another common way to pick up colds and flu. Chesty coughs are especially common as kids return to school. An antibiotic is rarely needed. Only 20% of chest infections are bacterial (green phlegm is a sign) so antibiotics are ineffective in the majority of cases.

New guidelines for children

There are new guidelines that came out in 2011 restricting the sale of coughs and cold remedies to children under 6. The Irish Medical Board brought these guidelines out not because there was any safety concern in children under 6, but because they recognised that coughs and colds in children are frequent and normally self limiting, and there is no real evidence to support the use of these products in children under 6. So, due to these guidelines, pharmacies can no longer sell products containing cough suppressants, decongestants or antihistamines. Therefore, products like Benylin® for children,



Robitussin or Sudafed can no longer be given to children under 6. Therefore, for a child under six, the best advice is rest, plenty of fluids. Most coughs and colds in children under 6 will pass quickly but if it is not improving or there are signs of a bacterial chest/nasal infection (green mucus is a sign), an antibiotic may be needed, however over 80 % of coughs and colds are viral so no antibiotic is needed.” For Chesty Coughs in children, Whelehans have recently introduced “Whelehans Paediatric Soothing Cough Syrup” which can help clear catarrh in children aged 2 to 10 years. Whelehans Paediatric Soothing Cough Syrup is strawberry flavor and is sugar free. Nelsons Sootha Cough Syrup or Glycerin Honey and Lemon can be given for coughs in under 6 but are more soothing than cough relieving and therefore may give some relief from dry coughs. Saline drops or spray (eg. Calpol® Salin Spray) are a good and safe option to clear sinuses in children over 6. Decongestants rubs or drops that can be put on the child’s chest or hankie beside the bed can be comforting for the child. Calpol® is still recommended for high temperature. For children over 6, there are many products and there is no one that stands out as best. There are some all in products that relieve coughs and unblock sinuses (eg) Benylin® coughs and colds (for dry cough with congestion) or Robitussin® Plus (for chesty cough with congestion). Always double check the dose before giving as there are different doses for different ages.

No need to see a doctor for colds and flus

Seeing a doctor when you have a cold or flu is a waste of your money on GP fees and prescription fees and, in the case of medical card holders, a waste of taxpayers’ money. It is also a waste of your time. It is also a waste of time for the GP who doesn’t need to see patients with colds and flu. GPs surgeries are being unnecessarily blocked up in Ireland with people visiting them for cold and flus and it reduces accessibility for people who have genuine reasons to see the GP. In many cases, especially at this time of year, people have to wait days to see their GP because of unnecessary visits by people with cold and flus. For coughs, you should only see a doctor if you have warning symptoms mentioned above.

Key points to remember about antibiotics

Antibiotics will not speed up your recovery or make you feel better if you have a viral illness. Most common infections such as common colds, coughs or flu don’t need antibiotics, they get better by themselves. Antibiotics are only effective against bacterial infections and can be lifesaving in certain infections such as meningitis, pneumonia and TB. We need to keep antibiotics for when we really need them. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed causes bacteria to become resistant to antibiotic treatments. So when antibiotics are needed in the future they will not work. Antibiotics can cause side effects such as diarrhoea, nausea and skin rashes. About one in five people taking antibiotics get side effects. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed puts your health at risk. Although flu usually lasts less than a week, tiredness may persist for weeks after other symptoms have cleared up. Whelehans Traditional Tonic contains B vitamins and is a very useful in relieving fatigue and help to speed up your recovery.

An alternative approach

Rubini® has recently been clinically proven to inhibit colds and flu. It is now available exclusively from Whelehans Pharmacy, Mullingar. Pharmacist Eamonn Brady from Whelehans invites you to take the Rubini® test.....at the first onset of a sore throat or cold, start a course of Rubini and you are likely to wake up the next day with no more cold symptoms. "Our customers have been amazed at the results" explains Eamonn. Rubini® is now available in the pharmacy without prescription.

New research shows that Elderberry, traditionally used for centuries to fight the common cold, coughs, viruses and the flu, is now clinically proven to do so. Rubini® is a new form of Elderberry, produced from organically grown Haschberg Sambucus Nigra. It is a completely natural product with no side effects. This special variety of Elderberry has 3 times more active polyphenols compared to ordinary Sambucus Nigra-plants. Rubini is clinically proven to inhibit cold and flu viruses and is a completely natural product. Amazingly, just one lozenge of Rubini is packed with the equivalent of approx 300 fresh Elderberry's! Rubini tastes great and is a particular favourite with children.

Disclaimer: Consult with your healthcare professional before making any changes recommended especially if you have a medical condition

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