

Cough

A cough is your body's natural reflex to clear your airways of things like mucus and dust.

A cough will usually go away within 3 weeks on its own.

How you can treat a cough yourself

Most coughs go away on their own within 3 weeks. There's usually no need to see a GP.

To ease a cough you can:

- rest
- drink plenty of fluids
- drink hot lemon with honey (not suitable for babies)

Hot lemon with honey has a similar effect as cough medicines.

[What to do if you have symptoms of COVID-19](#)

A pharmacist can help with a cough

Speak to your pharmacist if you have a cough. They can give you advice or suggest treatments to help you cough less, such as cough medicine and lozenges. These will not get rid of the cough.

You should not give some cough medicines to children under 12. Always check the label or ask your pharmacist for advice.

Go to your GP if:

- you've had a cough for more than 3 weeks (persistent cough)
- your cough is very bad or quickly gets worse, for example – you have a hacking (short, dry, and frequent) cough or you cannot stop coughing
- you have [asthma](#)
- you have chest pain
- you're losing weight for no reason

- the side of your neck feels swollen and painful (swollen glands)
- you find it hard to breathe
- you have a weakened immune system, for example because of chemotherapy or diabetes

 [Find a GP](#)

Ask for an urgent GP appointment if:

- you're coughing up blood

What happens at your appointment

To find out what's causing your cough, your GP might:

- take a sample of any mucus you might be coughing up
- order an x-ray, allergy test, or test to see how well your lungs work
- refer you to hospital to see a specialist, but this is rare

What causes coughs

Most coughs are caused by cold or flu.

Other causes include:

- smoking
- [heartburn \(acid reflux\)](#)
- allergies – for example, [hay fever](#)
- infections such as [bronchitis](#)
- mucus dripping down your throat from the back of your nose

A cough is very rarely a sign of something serious like lung cancer.

[Get help to quit smoking](#)

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