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URL of this page: <https://medlineplus.gov/cough.html>

Cough

Coughing is a reflex that keeps your throat and airways clear. Although it can be annoying, coughing helps your body heal or protect itself. Coughs can be either acute or chronic. Acute coughs begin suddenly and usually last no more than 2 to 3 weeks. Acute coughs are the kind you most often get with a cold [<https://medlineplus.gov/commoncold.html>] , flu [<https://medlineplus.gov/flu.html>] , or acute bronchitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/acutebronchitis.html>] . Chronic coughs last longer than 2 to 3 weeks. Causes of chronic cough include:




- Chronic bronchitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/chronicbronchitis.html>]
- Asthma [<https://medlineplus.gov/asthma.html>]
- Allergies [<https://medlineplus.gov/allergy.html>]
- COPD [<https://medlineplus.gov/copd.html>] (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- GERD [<https://medlineplus.gov/gerd.html>] (gastroesophageal reflux disease)
- Smoking [<https://medlineplus.gov/smoking.html>]
- Throat disorders [<https://medlineplus.gov/throatdisorders.html>] , such as croup [<https://medlineplus.gov/croup.html>] in young children
- Some medicines

Water can help ease your cough - whether you drink it or add it to the air with a steamy shower or vaporizer. If you have a cold or the flu, antihistamines may work better than non-prescription cough medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/coldandcoughmedicines.html>] . Children under four should not have cough medicine. For children over four, use caution and read labels carefully.

Start Here

- Cough [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/symptoms/cough/basics/definition/SYM-20050846?p=1>]
(Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/symptoms/cough/basics/definition/sym-20050846?p=1>]

Diagnosis and Tests

- Bronchoscopy and Bronchoalveolar Lavage (BAL) [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/bronchoscopy-and-bronchoalveolar-lavage-bal/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/broncoscopia-con-lavado-broncoalveolar/>]
- Sputum Culture [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/sputum-culture/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/cultivo-de-esputo/>]
- Tests for Lung Disease [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/lung-tests>]  (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/es/salud/pruebas-pulmonares>]


Prevention and Risk Factors

- Healthy Habits to Help Protect against Flu [<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevention/actions-prevent-flu.html>]
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Treatments and Therapies

- How to Handle a Cough [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/cough-sheet.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/cough-sheet.html>]
- Is It True that Honey Calms Coughs Better than Cough Medicine Do? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/symptoms/cough/expert-answers/honey/faq-20058031?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/symptoms/cough/expert-answers/honey/faq-20058031?p=1>]

Related Issues

- Cough Headaches [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/primary-cough-headaches/symptoms-causes/syc-20371200?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/primary-cough-headaches/symptoms-causes/syc-20371200?p=1>]
- Marvels of Mucus and Phlegm: The Slime That Keeps You Healthy [<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2020/08/marvels-mucus-phlegm>]  (National Institutes of Health)
Also in Spanish [<https://salud.nih.gov/recursos-de-salud/nih-noticias-de-salud/las-maravillas-de-la-mucosidad-y-la-flema>]

Specifics

- Chronic Cough [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/chronic-cough/symptoms-causes/syc-20351575?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
- Coughing up Blood [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/symptoms/coughing-up-blood/basics/definition/SYM-20050934?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)

Health Check Tools


- Cough [<https://familydoctor.org/symptom/cough/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/sintoma/tos/?adfree=true>]

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)


- Article: Capsaicin-assessed cough reflex in asthma patients. [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40698660>]
- Article: Airway anomalies in flexible bronchoscopy for pediatric chronic cough: predictive value... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40634708>]
- Article: Patient-reported outcome measures for cough used in interstitial lung disease: a... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40633974>]
- Cough -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Cough%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Find an Expert

- American Lung Association [<https://www.lung.org/>]
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/>] 

Children

- Cough in Children [<https://www.aaaai.org/tools-for-the-public/conditions-library/allergies/cough-in-children>] (American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.aaaai.org/tools-for-the-public/biblioteca-de-condiciones/biblioteca-de-alergia/tos-infantil-consejos-para-recordar>]
- Coughing (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/childs-cough.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/childs-cough.html>]

- **Croup: MedlinePlus Health Topic** [<https://medlineplus.gov/croup.html>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/croup.html>]

Patient Handouts

- **Cough** [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003072.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003072.htm>]
- **Coughing up blood** [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003073.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003073.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Chest x-ray [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003804.htm>]

Cough [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003072.htm>]

Coughing up blood [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003073.htm>]

Sputum Gram stain [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003765.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Acute Bronchitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/acutebronchitis.html>]

Breathing Problems [<https://medlineplus.gov/breathingproblems.html>]

Chronic Bronchitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/chronicbronchitis.html>]

Cold and Cough Medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/coldandcoughmedicines.html>]

Croup [<https://medlineplus.gov/croup.html>]

Lung Diseases [<https://medlineplus.gov/lungdiseases.html>]

Whooping Cough [<https://medlineplus.gov/whoopingcough.html>]

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