



[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → Hiccups

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Hiccups

A hiccup is an unintentional movement (spasm) of the diaphragm, the muscle at the base of the lungs. The spasm is followed by quick closing of the vocal cords. This closing of vocal cords produces a distinctive sound.

Considerations

Hiccups often start for no apparent reason. They most often disappear after a few minutes. In rare cases, hiccups can last for days, weeks, or months. Hiccups are common and normal in newborns and infants.

Causes

Causes may include:

- Abdominal surgery
- Disease or disorder that irritates the nerves that control the diaphragm (including pleurisy, pneumonia, or upper abdominal diseases)
- Hot and spicy foods or liquids
- Harmful fumes
- Stroke or tumor affecting the brain

There is usually no specific cause for hiccups.

Home Care

There is no sure way to stop hiccups, but there are a number of common suggestions that can be tried:

- Breathe repeatedly into a paper bag.
- Drink a glass of cold water.
- Eat a teaspoon (4 grams) of sugar.
- Hold your breath.

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Contact your health care provider if hiccups go on for more than a few days.

What to Expect at Your Office Visit

If you need to see your provider for hiccups, you will have a physical exam and be asked questions about the problem.

Questions may include:

- Do you get hiccups easily?
- How long has this episode of hiccups lasted?
- Did you recently eat something hot or spicy?
- Did you recently drink carbonated beverages?
- Have you been exposed to any fumes?
- What have you tried to relieve the hiccups?
- What has been effective for you in the past?
- How effective was the attempt?
- Did the hiccups stop for a while and then restart?
- Do you have other symptoms?

Additional tests are only done when a disease or disorder is suspected as the cause.

To treat hiccups that do not go away, the provider may perform gastric lavage or massage of the carotid sinus in the neck. DO NOT try carotid massage by yourself. This must be done by a provider.

If hiccups continue, medicines may help. Tube insertion into the stomach (nasogastric intubation) may also help.

In very rare cases, if medicines or other methods do not work, treatment such as phrenic nerve block may be tried. The phrenic nerve controls the diaphragm.

Alternative Names

Singultus

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