



Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

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Dealing with a cough

A cough is your body's response to something that bothers your throat or airways. Many things can cause a cough. You might cough because of a cold or influenza (flu), bronchitis, or asthma. Smoking, post-nasal drip, allergies, and stomach acid that backs up into your throat also can cause a cough.

A cough can be short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic). A chronic cough lasts more than eight weeks. A chronic cough is often caused by a long-term problem, such as asthma. Another cause might be a medicine, such as an ACE inhibitor.

A cough is a symptom, not a disease. To treat a chronic cough, you may need to treat the problem that causes it. You can take a few steps at home to cough less and feel better. Some people cough or clear their throat out of habit for no clear reason.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Drink plenty of water and other fluids. This may help soothe a dry or sore throat. Honey or lemon juice in hot water or tea may ease a dry cough.
- Prop up your head on pillows to help you breathe and ease a cough.
- Do not smoke or allow others to smoke around you. Smoke can make a cough worse. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.
- Avoid exposure to smoke, dust, or other pollutants, or wear a face mask. Check with your doctor or pharmacist to find out which type of face mask will give you the most benefit.
- Take cough medicine as directed by your doctor.

- Try cough drops or hard candy to soothe a dry or sore throat.

Throat clearing

When you have a chronic cough or a disease that may cause this type of cough, you may often feel like you want to clear your throat. This helps bring up mucus. But throat clearing does not always have a cause.

Throat clearing can become a habit. The more you do it, the more you feel like you need to do it. But frequent throat clearing can be hard on your vocal cords. It's like slamming them together.

To help lessen throat clearing, you can try:

- Taking small sips of water.
- Not clearing your throat when you feel you need to.
- Swallowing hard when you want to clear your throat.
- You may want to ask your doctor if a medicine that thins mucus would help.

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if you have severe trouble breathing.

Call your doctor or Health Link at 811, or seek immediate medical care if:

- You cough up blood.
- You have new or worse trouble breathing.
- You have a new or higher fever.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor or nurse advice line if:

- You cough more deeply or more often, especially if you notice more mucus or a change in the colour of your mucus.
- You do not get better as expected.