

VIRAL CHEST INFECTIONS AND COUGH

Most coughs are caused by viral infections, and usually soon go. This leaflet gives some tips on what to do, and the symptoms to look out for which may indicate a more serious illness. Viral infections commonly affect the nose, throat (larynx), or the main airway (trachea), or the airways going into the lungs (bronchi). These infections are sometimes called laryngitis, tracheitis, or bronchitis. Cough is often the main symptom.

What are the symptoms of cough caused by a virus?

The cough typically develops over a day or so, and may become quite irritating. Other symptoms may develop and include raised temperature ie over 38 degrees (fever), headache, body aches and pains. Cold symptoms may occur if the infection also affects the nose. Symptoms typically peak after 2-3 days, and then gradually clear over 7-12 days . **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.

What is the treatment?

There is **no 'quick fix'** for a cough due to a viral infection. You need to be patient until the cough goes. A main aim of treatment is to ease symptoms whilst your immune system clears the infection. The most useful treatments are:

- **Taking [paracetamol](#), [ibuprofen](#), [aspirin](#)** to reduce high temperature (fever), and to ease any aches, pains and headaches. (Children aged under 16 should not take aspirin.)
- **Not Antibiotics**
- **Having lots to drink** if you have a fever, to prevent mild lack of fluid in the body (dehydration).
- **Stopping** smoking. If you smoke, you should try to [stop for good](#). A cough and serious lung diseases are more common in smokers.

What about cold and cough remedies?

You can buy many other 'cold and cough remedies' at pharmacies. There **is little evidence** of any impact on the infection, but they may be useful for certain symptoms. For example, a decongestant nasal spray may help to clear a blocked nose.

.What about antibiotic medicines?

Antibiotics are not usually advised. Antibiotics do not kill Viruses - they only kill germs called **Bacteria**. Antibiotics do not usually ease a cough caused by a virus. They may even make symptoms worse, as they sometimes cause side-effects such as diarrhoea, feeling sick, thrush and rashes.

. Antibiotics may also be prescribed if a complication develops such as secondary bacterial pneumonia - but this is unlikely to occur if you are otherwise healthy.

What symptoms should I look out for?

Most viral coughs clear without complications. However, sometimes a 'secondary' infection with germs (bacteria) develops in addition to the viral infection. This may become serious and cause [pneumonia](#). Also, other causes of cough (such as [asthma](#)) are sometimes confused with a viral infection. So, see a doctor if any of the following occur.

- If symptoms such as high temperature over 40 degrees (fever- HOME CHECK ADVISED), chest pains, or headaches become worse or severe.
- If you develop breathing difficulties such as wheezing or shortness of breath.
- If you cough up blood. Blood may be bright red but dark or rusty-coloured sputum may indicate blood.
- If you become drowsy or confused.
- If you have a cough that persists for longer than 4 weeks

IN LINE WITH GOOD MEDICAL PRACTICE – THIS SURGERY IS AN ANTIBIOTIC GUARDIAN – PLEASE DO NOT EMBRASS THE DOCTOR FOR ANTIBIOTICS WHEN ITS NOT NEEDED