



## Fact sheet No.7



## Easy Read

# Cough in Adults



This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you get a cough.

It also tells you when you should become concerned and see your doctor.

## Types of cough

A cough may be:

- **Acute.** This means it lasts a short time - less than 3 weeks

An **acute** cough is usually caused by a cold.





- **Chronic.** This means it may go on for a long time - more than eight weeks.



A **chronic** cough is common in smokers and it might mean you have a problem with your lungs.



It might also be caused by something else like a problem with your stomach.



- **Dry.** This means it doesn't make any phlegm.
- **Productive.** This means it does bring up some phlegm.



**Phlegm** is a thick stuff that comes up into your mouth when you cough. It is also called **sputum**.



Most adults get a cough between two and five times a year.

About one in five people have a cough during the winter months.

A cough is hardly ever serious. It usually gets better by itself.

You may also get a cough from:



- Taking certain drugs - check the label for:
  - ▶ Side effects - these are other things that might happen to you when you take this drug
  - ▶ Things in the drug that you might be allergic to



- Asthma



- Poor quality of the air, or lots of dust

## What may happen?



- Coughing is usually harmless.

It will usually start to improve within three weeks.



- There is no need for **antibiotics** - they may do more harm than good.



An **antibiotic** is a type of medicine or tablet that is used to cure certain types of disease.



- You may have a dry cough for 3 to 4 weeks after an **infection** has settled.



An **infection** is a type of disease.



- You don't normally need any tests if you suffer from an acute cough.

# What can I do myself to get better?

## 1. Try not to cough.



You may be able to cough less often by trying not to cough.

This is because our brain is sometimes telling us to cough when our body doesn't need to.

## 2. Home remedies



Try a drink of 'honey and lemon'.

Add freshly squeezed juice from one lemon and a teaspoon of honey to a mug of hot water.



Drink at least 6 to 9 glasses of water in a day and suck lozenges.



### 3. Stop smoking

Smoking is one of the commonest reasons for a **chronic** cough.

Stopping smoking also benefits your health in other ways.



### 4. Cough mixtures

We don't think that cough mixtures make much difference.

But if you think they are helping - they might help a bit.

Speak to your pharmacist for advice.



### 5. Paracetamol

**Paracetamol** can help with other symptoms that you may have with a cough, such as a sore throat, fevers, and not feeling well.



**Paracetamol** is a medicine or tablet that is used to treat pain or a fever.



# When should I seek medical help?



Get medical advice immediately if you feel more unwell than you'd expect.



Get help from a doctor if:

- You feel more unwell than you'd expect after you have choked on something



- You are coughing up blood



- Your cough is not getting better within three to four weeks.



- As well as your cough you also have a chest or shoulder pain



- You find it difficult to breathe



- You're losing weight without trying for six weeks or more.



- Your voice becomes hoarse for longer than three weeks, and the hoarseness persists after the cough has settled.



- You notice new swellings anywhere in the neck or above your collarbones.



# Where can I find out more?



## NHS Choices

**Web:** [www.nhs.uk/conditions/Cough/Pages/Introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Cough/Pages/Introduction.aspx)

Remember that your pharmacist can also help you.