



[Return to Web version](#)

## Chronic Cough

### Overview

#### What is a chronic cough?

A chronic cough is a cough that lasts for 8 weeks or more. It's usually caused by an underlying condition, such as allergies or heartburn, and usually goes away after the underlying condition is treated.

### Symptoms

#### When should I call my doctor?

The following are some questions to help you decide whether you should see your doctor about your cough:

- Are you coughing up phlegm?
- Are you wheezing (making a whistling sound when you breathe in)?
- Are you running a temperature higher than 101°F?
- Are you losing weight without trying?
- Are you having drenching sweats in bed at night (the sheets and your pajamas get soaking wet)?
- Are you coughing up blood?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, call your doctor. He or she will want to find out if you have an illness that is causing the cough. If you answered "no" to all of these questions, one of the causes listed below may be causing your cough.

### Causes & Risk Factors

#### What can cause chronic cough?

##### Smoking

Smoking can cause a cough that doesn't go away.

##### Allergies

Postnasal drip caused by allergies can make you cough. Postnasal drip is mucus that runs down your throat from the back of your nose.

##### Medicines

Certain medicines, such as angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors for high blood pressure, can cause chronic cough. If you are taking medicines, ask your doctor if any of the medicines you use could cause you to cough.

## Asthma

Coughing can be a sign of asthma. In some people who have mild asthma, a cough may be the only symptom. Your doctor may perform breathing tests to find out if you have asthma. He or she may also ask you to try taking some asthma medicine to see if your cough goes away.

## Heartburn

Acid from your stomach may back up into your throat. This is called "acid reflux." It can cause heartburn or a cough. Acid reflux is more common when you're lying down.

# Treatment

## Smoking

If you smoke, you should stop. Talk to your doctor about using a nicotine replacement product, a prescription medicine or another method to help you stop smoking.

## Allergies

If you have postnasal drip from allergies, try to avoid the things you are allergic to (allergens). Common allergens include the following:

- Dust
- Smoke
- Pollen, mold and freshly cut grass
- Pets
- Certain plants
- Cleaning agents and room deodorizers
- Chemical fumes

An over-the-counter (OTC) medicine may help relieve your allergy symptoms, including a cough. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to help you choose one.

## Medicines

If you are taking a medicine that can cause you to cough, your doctor might be able to prescribe another medicine for you. Don't stop taking a prescribed medicine unless your doctor tells you to.

## Asthma

If you have asthma, your doctor will help you decide on the right treatment for your symptoms.

## Heartburn

If you have acid reflux, try raising the head of your bed about 4 inches. It might also help to avoid eating or drinking for a few hours before you lie down. Ask your doctor about OTC or prescription medicines that can help relieve the symptoms of acid reflux by reducing or neutralizing the acid in your stomach.

# Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What is the most likely cause of my cough?
- How much longer can I expect my cough to last?
- Is my cough contagious?

- What over-the-counter medicines might help relieve my cough?
- Are there any health risks to having a long-lasting cough?

Written by familydoctor.org editorial staff

Reviewed/Updated: 09/10

Created: 09/00

---