

Winter Action Patient Information Leaflet

COUGH



Cough is part of the body's defence mechanism and helps to prevent the lungs becoming damaged from the dust and germs that we can breathe in. A cough may be either chesty with the production of mucus or phlegm or dry and irritating with little or no mucus.

Chesty Cough is often associated with colds or flu but may take several weeks to go completely. Mucus (or phlegm) is produced in the upper airways to act as a barrier to trap dust and germs that is then cleared away as we cough.

Dry Cough can also last for several weeks and can occur after other cold symptoms have largely cleared up. The cough may be tickly and irritating but produces little or no mucus.

When do I need antibiotics?

Antibiotics don't help most coughs get better and can have unpleasant side effects such as diarrhoea, thrush, rashes or tummy upsets. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed can produce resistant germs which means that they will not work so well against more serious infections.

How can I help my cough?

- Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration
- Take paracetamol if you have a temperature or aches and pains but do not take more than the dose recommended on the packet. Paracetamol is also available as a liquid medicine for children (e.g. Calpol).
- Some people find cough medicines, lozenges or sweets are soothing. Your pharmacist can recommend a suitable product.
- Adding a few menthol crystals or some Friar's Balsam to a bowl of warm water and inhaling the fumes can help to loosen thick mucus and make it easier to cough up.

It is necessary to contact your doctor if:

- You begin to cough up blood
- You become unusually breathless
- The cough does not improve or gets worse after 2-3 weeks
- If you develop any other new or worrying symptoms
- If you have another illness (asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, or congestive heart failure)

For further information please log on to :

www.patient.co.uk or www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk