

# *Occupational Health & Wellbeing*

**Nov – 13 – Issue 14/13**

## **Cough Relief and Cough Treatments.**

Constant coughing can stop you in your tracks and make you miserable. During the cold and flu season you're even more at risk of developing a hacking cough that leaves your chest aching. However, colds and flu aren't the only problems that cause coughing. Allergies, asthma, heartburn, dry air and smoking are also common causes of coughs. Even some medicines for high blood pressure and allergies can trigger a chronic cough.

Try these tips to manage your cough at home:

### **Stay hydrated**

An upper respiratory tract infection like a cold or flu causes postnasal drip. Extra secretions trickle down the back of your throat, irritating it and sometimes causing a cough. Drinking plenty of fluids helps to thin out the mucous in postnasal drip. Drinking liquids also helps to keep mucous membranes moist. This is particularly helpful in the winter when homes tend to be dry - another cause of coughing.

### **Try lozenges and hot drinks**

Some experts suggest menthol cough drops, which help numb the back of the throat and tend to decrease the cough reflex. Drinking warm tea with honey may also soothe the throat. There is some clinical evidence to support this approach. A study involving 105 children, published in the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, investigated the soothing properties of honey. The researchers concluded that honey was the most effective cough treatment compared to an over-the-counter medicine, or no treatment at all.

However, the NHS says while this study indicates honey may be of some help with cough symptoms, larger studies on the longer term use of honey are needed. It also points out that because of the risk of infant botulism, honey should never be given to a child under one year old and medical attention should always be sought for a persistent cough.

### **Take steamy showers and use a humidifier**

A hot shower can help a cough by loosening secretions in the nose. Experts say this remedy can help ease coughs not only from colds, but also from allergies and asthma.

Humidifiers may also help. In a dry, centrally heated home, nasal secretions can become dried out and uncomfortable. Putting moisture back in the air can help your cough, but be careful not to overdo it.

Also make sure the humidifier is cleaned properly and frequently or it can become a reservoir for pumping out fungus, mould and bacteria into the air.

### **Remove irritants in the air**

Perfumes and scented bathroom sprays may seem harmless, but for some people they can cause chronic, or long-term, sinus irritation. This can lead to a chronic cough because of the production of excess mucous. Take control by avoiding such scented products.

The worst irritant in the air, of course, is smoke. Almost all smokers eventually develop a 'smoker's cough'. Also, everyone around the smoker may suffer from some airway irritation. The best solution is to stop smoking. Doctors warn that severe chronic coughs can be a sign of COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) or lung cancer in smokers, so be sure to see your GP if you're a smoker with a chronic (long-term) cough.

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### **Take medicines to treat coughs**

When steamy showers, hot teas and cough drops don't help, you can turn to over-the-counter medicines to ease your cough. However, the NHS says there's little evidence that cough medicines actually work, but some of the ingredients may be helpful with symptoms associated with a cough - such as a stuffy nose or a high temperature. Also bear in mind the regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), has recommended that over-the-counter cough and cold medicines shouldn't be given to children under the age of six. This is due to the possibility of unwanted side effects like allergies, sleep issues or hallucinations.

### **Decongestants**

Decongestants relieve nasal congestion by shrinking swollen nasal tissue and reducing mucous production. They dry up mucous in the lungs and open up the airway passages. They come in pills, liquids and nasal sprays. Oral decongestants such as pills and liquids can raise blood pressure, so people with high blood pressure need to be careful using them. Also, overuse of decongestants can lead to excessive dryness, which can trigger a dry cough. The NHS says decongestants should not be used for more than seven days as doing so can lead to the nose becoming more blocked, called rebound congestion.

### **Cough suppressants and expectorants**

If you're coughing so much that your chest hurts and you're getting a bad night's sleep, consider a cough suppressant treatment. Check with your GP or pharmacist before taking cough suppressants. Always seek medical advice for any unexplained symptoms. Don't use decongestants for more than seven days. They can cause the nose to become more blocked after a person stops taking them. This is called rebound congestion. When a person has a cough that is thick with phlegm, taking an expectorant may help. Expectorants help to thin out the mucous so coughing is easier.

### **Bedtime tips**

Night-time coughs are usually worse because the post nasal mucous doesn't drain properly and lingers in the throat irritating it when you lay down at night. Sleeping on an incline may help - so try to defy gravity by propping yourself up with some pillows while you sleep.

Another option for people with heartburn that is causing a cough is to place supports under the head of the bed to raise it about 10cm (4 inches). With that angle, you may keep acids down in your stomach where they won't irritate your throat.

In case you start coughing in the night, have everything you need by your bed -- a glass of water, cough drops and anything else that seems to help. The sooner you can stop a coughing fit, the better. Continually coughing irritates your airways, which can make your night-time problem last longer.

If you have a cough and are prone to allergies, check your bed. Dust mites, tiny insects that feed on dead flakes of skin, are found in bedding and are a common allergy trigger. Dust mites are around all year but their numbers usually peak during the winter. To get rid of them, wash all your bedding in hot water once a week. You may also want to vacuum the mattress and pillows and wrap your mattress and pillows in plastic to stave off dust mites.

### **Find out what's causing your cough**

Coughs caused by the common cold usually go away in a few weeks. Chronic, persistent coughs may be caused by underlying medical problems such as allergies, asthma, heartburn -- or by the medicines you take. To get rid of those coughs you need to treat the underlying problem. Always seek medical advice if your cough lasts longer than three weeks, if you are coughing up blood, or if you're having other symptoms such as weight loss, chills or fatigue.

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