

ARE YOU COUGHING REGULARLY?

Chronic coughing is one of the most common reasons for family doctor visits. Although it is a common health problem, a chronic cough is not something to ignore. Untreated, it can interfere with daily activities and make sleeping and eating difficult.

Post nasal drip

What is a chronic cough?

The ability to cough is an important part of normal lung function. Coughing from time to time helps clear particles and secretions from the lungs and prevents infection.

A chronic cough is defined as a cough that lasts for three weeks or longer.

What can cause a chronic cough? Asthma

Some of the most common causes of chronic cough include:

- Post nasal drip syndrome (mucus that drips down the throat from the back of the nose—it's usually triggered by allergies)
- Asthma

- Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (sometimes called acid reflux – a condition in which acid from the stomach backs up into your throat)

- Side effects of ACE inhibitors (medicines used to treat high blood pressure)

- Smoking, or a lung disease caused by smoking (for example, COPD)

In rare cases chronic cough can be caused by diseases such as tuberculosis or cancer of the lungs or oesophagus.

Chronic cough is a symptom of something else

A chronic cough is not a disease in itself. It is typically

a sign that something is wrong with the breathing system. That's why it isn't a good idea to take cough medicine for more than a week or two unless your doctor tells you to. Instead, get to the root of your chronic cough by visiting the doctor.

How will my doctor find the cause of my chronic cough?

The first step in treating a chronic cough is to identify its cause. Your doctor may do several tests to determine the cause of your cough.

First your doctor will compile a history. He or she might ask you about allergies, the medications you are currently taking, whether you smoke or have smoked in the past, your exposure to chemicals at home or work, recent illnesses, etc.

Your doctor may also order a chest x-ray. Depending on the x-ray results, the doctor may order lung function tests or refer you to a specialist. Once the doctor knows the cause(s) of your cough, he or she will be able to recommend treatment.

Remember, in the vast majority of cases a chronic cough can be successfully treated. The earlier your doctor can identify the cause, the better.

