

# Living with Chronic Cough

A resource for patients and families from the Canadian Lung Association

For more information on chronic cough, including chronic cough in children, visit [www.lung.ca/chronic-cough](http://www.lung.ca/chronic-cough).

Scan this QR code to go directly to the Chronic Cough section of our website.



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B R E A T H E  
the lung association

## What is chronic cough?

A chronic cough is a cough lasting eight weeks or more. A chronic cough may or may not be a sign of serious health issue, but it can affect you physically and socially and can disrupt your life.

## What causes chronic cough?

Chronic cough can be caused by many different things. The most common causes of chronic cough are:

- respiratory infection
- asthma
- postnasal drip
- tobacco use
- gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)
- certain medications
- cough hypersensitivity syndrome (CHS)

## When should I see a healthcare provider about my cough?

If you suspect you may have a chronic cough, speak to your healthcare provider. Even if your cough has not lasted more than eight weeks, you still may need to see a healthcare provider. If you're not sure, ask yourself the following questions. If you answer yes to any of them, you should see someone on your healthcare team.

- Are you coughing up blood?
- Are you short of breath?
- Has your cough changed over time?
- Are you losing weight without trying?
- Are you coughing up phlegm?
- Do you have a fever?
- Do you currently smoke?
- Did you smoke in the past?
- Are you living with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or other respiratory conditions?
- Is your cough causing abdominal pain?
- Is your cough causing incontinence or leakage of stool?

## What treatments are available for chronic cough?

Treatment for your chronic cough will depend on its cause. Keep in mind that the first medication recommended by your healthcare team may not successfully treat your cough. You may need to try several different medications before your healthcare team finds the right one.

<b>If your cough is caused by...</b>	<b>It may be treated with...</b>
A bacterial infection	Antibiotics
Asthma or COPD	Inhaler(s)
Postnasal drip (PND)	Antihistamine (allergy) pills Decongestants (pills or spray) Nasal sprays with corticosteroids or ipratropium bromide Saline nasal rinses
GERD	Changes in your diet or eating habits Medication to reduce acid production (proton pump inhibitors)
ACE inhibitors	A change in medication

### A note about "smoker's cough"

A "smoker's cough" is not normal: it may be a sign of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Quitting smoking will improve your lung health and help you get rid of your cough.

If you need help to quit smoking or are worried about your cough caused by smoking, there are supports available to you. Speak with your pharmacist or other healthcare provider about how you can quit smoking, or visit [www.lung.ca/smoking-and-tobacco](http://www.lung.ca/smoking-and-tobacco).

## What you can do to manage your cough

Speak to your healthcare provider about different options that can offer you relief from chronic cough. Prescription medications and behaviour modification therapy are two options that your healthcare provider may suggest. There are also things that you can do to manage your cough to make it less disruptive in your life.



### Quit smoking

Help is available. Speak to your healthcare provider or visit [www.lung.ca](http://www.lung.ca).



### Drink fluids

Water or warm water with honey and/or lemon are soothing.



### Suck on cough drops or hard candy

Note that medicated cough drops or cough syrups are not recommended for chronic cough.



### Avoid sources of smoke and other irritants

Avoid environments where smoke from tobacco or a wood fire or dust, pollen or pollution can irritate your lungs.



### Keep yourself from getting sick

Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer and consider wearing a mask if you are around large groups of people, may be around people who are sick or are sick yourself.

Ask your healthcare team about recommended vaccinations to prevent flu or COVID-19.