

# Cough: Care Instructions



## Overview

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A cough is your body's response to something that bothers your throat or airways. Many things can cause a cough. You might cough because of a cold or the flu, bronchitis, or asthma. Smoking, postnasal drip, allergies, and stomach acid that backs up into your throat also can cause coughs.

A cough is a symptom, not a disease. Most coughs stop when the cause, such as a cold, goes away. You can take a few steps at home to cough less and feel better.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

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- Drink lots of water and other fluids. This helps thin the mucus and soothes a dry or sore throat. Honey or lemon juice in hot water or tea may ease a dry cough.
- Take cough medicine as directed by your doctor.
- Prop up your head on pillows to help you breathe and ease a dry cough.
- Try cough drops or hard candy to soothe a dry or sore throat.
- Do not smoke. Avoid secondhand smoke. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.

## When should you call for help?

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**Call 911** anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You have severe trouble breathing.

**Call your doctor now** or seek immediate medical care if:

- You cough up blood.
- You have new or worse trouble breathing.
- You have a new or higher fever.
- You have a new rash.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You cough more deeply or more often, especially if you notice more mucus or a change in the color of your mucus.
- You have new symptoms, such as a sore throat, an earache, or sinus pain.
- You do not get better as expected.

## Where can you learn more?

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Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/PatientEd>

Enter **D279** in the search box to learn more about "**Cough: Care Instructions**".

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