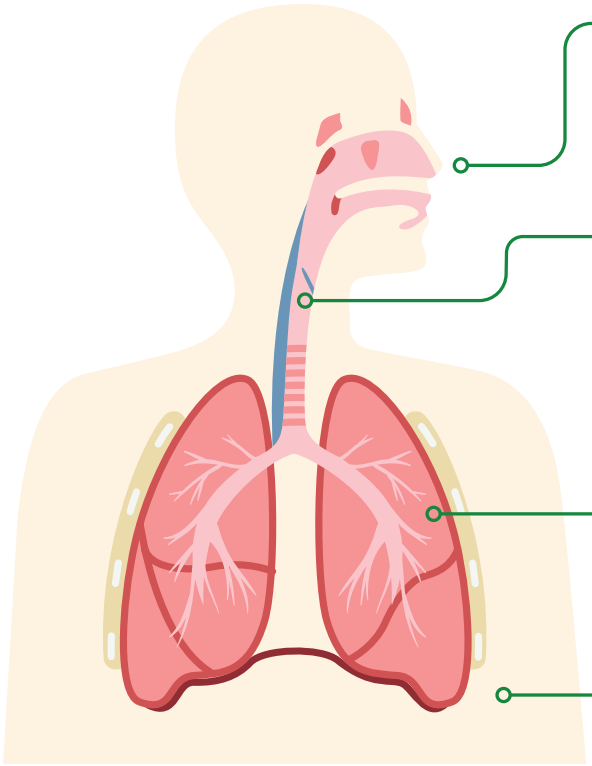
Treatments for chronic cough in adults

Coughing that won't go away and occurs most days could be a sign of other health problems, especially if it has lasted more than 8 weeks. Self-treatment with home remedies or over-the-counter medicines might ease symptoms but won't fix the cause. It's important to speak with your GP – getting an early diagnosis can help you manage your health and feel better sooner.

Some common causes of chronic cough

Chronic cough can be caused by a wide range of conditions. When you see your GP, they should order some tests to find out the cause of your cough.



- Problems with your airways (nose, sinuses)

- Problems with your throat
- Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD)
- Problems swallowing
- Infections

- Problems with your lungs including asthma, bronchitis, lung diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), bronchiectasis and lung cancer
- Problems with your airways
- Problems with your heart
- Infections

- Breathing in dust, gases and fumes in the workplace
- ACE inhibitors – medications commonly used to treat high blood pressure

Your doctor should recommend a treatment that is specific to you and the cause of your cough.

Not all chronic coughs need antibiotics.

Not all chronic coughs need medications, and you might not be prescribed one.

Scan the QR code to find out **what to expect during diagnosis and follow-up for chronic cough**

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Causes and possible treatment options

Treatments vary for different people and different causes of cough. Most treatments should be covered by Medicare. Ask your doctor if there are any additional costs involved.

Cough caused by problems with your lungs

Asthma

- If you already take medications for your asthma, your doctor and/or nurse will review them and how you are taking them. They may change the inhalers that you use
- If you haven't been treated for asthma before, your doctor should discuss what medications will work for you

Bronchiectasis

A condition in which the airways in your lungs widen or develop pouches. Treatments may include:

- Antibiotics
- Referral to a respiratory physiotherapist for airway clearance (chest physiotherapy) and breathing techniques to help clear mucus from your lungs
- Pulmonary rehabilitation

Eosinophilic bronchitis

This is a type of airway inflammation that may be associated with exposure to things like dust. Your doctor may prescribe:

- Inhalers with corticosteroids
- Other medications

Interstitial lung diseases (ILD)

ILD is the term used to describe over 200 different lung diseases. If your cough is associated with an ILD, your doctor will discuss what treatment options are right for you.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

Chronic cough is common in people with COPD. Your doctor may recommend:

- Reviewing your COPD medications and how you use your inhalers
- Pulmonary rehabilitation
- Making an action plan so you know what to do when your COPD gets worse
- Referral to a respiratory physiotherapist to help you clear mucus from your lungs

Chronic bronchitis is a type of COPD. If your cough is linked to chronic bronchitis, your doctor will talk to you about:

- Treatments to break up mucus in your lungs so you can cough it up easier
- Antibiotics if you have an infection

Lung cancer

If you have lung cancer and your anti-cancer treatments are not helping with the coughing, your doctor may investigate potential causes or consider other ways to manage it, such as:

- Specific breathing exercises
- Endobronchial-brachytherapy (a type of treatment that focuses high-dose radiation on tumours)
- Other medications

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Cough caused by problems with your airways (nose, sinuses)

- Allergic rhinitis: Nose sprays with corticosteroids or antihistamines
- Chronic rhinosinusitis: Nose sprays with corticosteroids, sinus rinsing or antibiotics

Cough caused by problems with your throat or vocal cords

- Your doctor may refer you to a speech pathologist who specialises in voice therapy to teach you different ways to manage your coughing

Cough caused by gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) or problems swallowing

- Healthy diet
- Try to sleep upright on an angle so you are not lying flat when sleeping
- Avoid eating 3 hours before bedtime
- Some possible medications include proton-pump inhibitors and antacids
- In some cases, surgery may be an option

Unexplained chronic cough

If a cause for your cough cannot be found, your GP will refer you to a specialist to help manage your cough. Management may include:

- **Lifestyle changes**
  - Quitting smoking or vaping, if you currently smoke or vape
  - Avoiding any environmental or occupational exposures such as dust
- **Other therapies**
  - Some therapies such as voice-specialist speech pathology and chronic cough clinics may help you manage your cough
- **Medications**
  - Changing some of your current medications and trying something different
  - Antibiotics

What about over-the-counter medicines?

If you are thinking of trying over-the-counter cough syrups or other remedies, make sure you speak with your doctor or pharmacist first as some options might:

- Not work
- Make your cough worse
- Only provide temporary relief and not treat the cause of your cough

Scan the QR code to find out more about **things you can do to help manage your cough**

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Follow-up after treatment

Finding a treatment that works may take some time and you might need to try several different options. Once you have started treatment, make sure you follow your doctor's instructions and book follow-up appointments to check how your treatment is working.

Process of finding a treatment

Determine the cause of your cough › Discuss treatment options › Begin treatment › Follow-up appointment to see if the treatment is working › Try another treatment or try time off treatment

While you are having treatment for your cough, you should track your symptoms every day. Keep a diary writing down how often you cough, when you cough and if you feel your cough has improved or not. Consider giving your cough a daily score out of 10 to help you keep track.

- This will make it easier for you to discuss if the treatment is working during follow-up appointments with your doctor
- You can also explain if you experience any side effects from the treatment. This is especially important for people who are taking multiple medications as sometimes they can interact with each other

Further information and support

Contact our Lung Health Helpline on 1800 654 301. This free and confidential service is available Monday to Friday 8:00am – 4:30pm (AEST) (excl. public holidays) or fill in the form on our website.

Note to reader: This information is intended as a general guide only and is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice or treatment. While all care is taken to ensure accuracy at the time of publication, Lung Foundation Australia and its members exclude all liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by use of or reliance on the information provided. Always consult with your doctor about matters that affect your health.

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