

# Tips for managing adult chronic cough alongside your doctor's treatment

Coughing can have a huge impact on your physical and emotional health. If you have been coughing most days for more than 8 weeks, see your doctor for treatments that target the cause of your cough. The tips in this factsheet can help you manage your cough alongside treatments prescribed by your doctor or healthcare professional.

## Self-management strategies for cough

### Things you can try

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Breathe through your nose, not your mouth, to reduce dry air contacting your throat
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Use a hand-held fan on your face when you feel like you need to cough
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Minimise breathing in cold air. For example, wear a mask or cover your nose and mouth with a scarf when walking outside
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Keep your throat moist by sipping water every 15-30 minutes
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Try breathing in steam for 10-15 minutes (or as long as you can tolerate). You can inhale steam when in the shower or from hot water in a sink
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Try sucking on menthol or honey lozenges. Avoid flavoured or butter-based lozenges as they are not as effective
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Speak with your doctor about alternative options that might help. Some people report a benefit from taking slippery elm, ginger, marshmallow root or honey
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Try swallowing when you have a tickle in your throat to suppress a cough
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Learn breathing exercises that can help you stop coughing. Some people find yoga-based breathing useful. The next page includes some exercises you can try

### Things you should avoid

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Things that may make you cough such as extreme temperatures and environmental hazards - dust, smoke or aerosol chemicals
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Caffeine and alcohol as they can dry out your throat
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Smoking or vaping. It affects your health and worsens your cough. For support to quit, talk to your GP or call Quitline on 13 78 48. Also avoid breathing in any second-hand smoke
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Speaking for long periods of time or take breaks as needed to reduce irritation in your throat

# Other therapies

## Breathing exercises

These breathing exercises can help you manage your cough. If you start to feel a tickle in your throat, you may be able to stop the cough from happening. If the cough has already started, it can help to make the episode less severe. Speak with your doctor if referral to a speech pathologist, specialising in voice therapy and breathing techniques may be suitable for you.



**You can use these techniques at any time to get your coughing under control, including if you are having a severe episode.**

- Practice these exercises, so you are prepared when you start coughing. Practice by choosing one of the exercises below. Aim to do this 3 times with a 5-10 second break in between
- It is recommended to practice in short bursts (a few minutes) spread out throughout the day

### The stop cough technique

- 1 At the first sign of a tickle or as soon as you feel you are about to cough, put your hand over your mouth
- 2 Swallow once
- 3 Hold your breath for a few seconds. When you start breathing again take slow, smooth breaths through your nose for at least 30 seconds, while keeping your hand over your mouth
- 4 Tell yourself that you are not going to cough
- 5 Take a smooth, normal-sized breath through your nose and take your hand away from your mouth
- 6 If you still feel a tickle in your throat, repeat the exercise from the beginning until the tickle has gone

### Sniff and suck breathing exercises (choose one out of the three)

|        | Option 1: Sniff/suck puff puff   | Option 2: Sniff/suck and blow   | Option 3: Sniff/suck and voice   |
|--------|--|---|--|
| Step 1 | Take a sharp sniff in through your nose<br><b>OR</b><br>Purse your lips and take a short sharp breath in through your mouth<br><b>OR</b><br>Seal your lips around a straw and take a short sharp breath in (continue to use the straw throughout)    |   |  |
| Step 2 | Gently blow the air out through pursed lips in two puffs   | Gently blow the air out over 2-3 seconds in one breath through pursed lips  | Blow the air out in one gentle breath making a 'dge' or 'zz' sound                   |
|        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try to puff up (inflate) your cheeks</li><li>• Try and make the second puff longer than the first</li><li>• If you can't puff your cheeks, just breathe out through pursed lips making a pff sound</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try to puff up (inflate) your cheeks</li><li>• If you can't puff your cheeks, just breathe out through pursed lips making a pff sound</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try to breathe out for 2-3 seconds</li></ul> |

To watch a video demonstration on these breathing exercises, we have included a link on the last page.

# Looking after your mental health

Taking care of your mental health is an important part of managing your cough.

## Manage your stress and anxiety

Anxiety and stress may make your cough worse. If you feel overwhelmed, you could try:



**Slow breathing.** Count to 3 as you slowly inhale and then count to 6 as you exhale. Counting longer as you breathe out helps calm you down



**Mindfulness.** This is a way to help with anxiety and stress. Try focusing on:

- What you can hear and see around you. Try to notice things you may not have noticed before
- How you feel, physically and emotionally. Be aware of your body and where your body is to create a safe space around you



**Relaxation techniques.** Try doing things that you find relaxing, like listening to calming music or doing some yoga or meditation



**Visualisation.** Find a quiet place and use your imagination to paint a calming mental picture. For example, you may imagine you are at the beach, and you can:

- Hear the waves crashing
- Smell the salty air
- Feel the warmth of the sun
- See the bright blue sky



**Join a support group for people who have similar conditions.** Just knowing that you are not alone can help to manage stress and anxiety. You can visit the Lung Foundation Australia website to find a support group or call our Information and Support Team

There are lots of different things you can do to help manage stress and anxiety but it may take a few tries until you find something that works for you. You can also speak with your doctor or healthcare professional so they can talk you through different strategies.

If you're interested in learning more about free counselling and support services available, we have included links on the last page.

## Take control of your cough management

Finding what works best for you can help you manage your cough.



**Try keeping a diary** to track your cough. This will help you talk to your doctor about your symptoms, and come up with strategies for when your cough is at its worst



**Educate other people** that a chronic cough may be caused by other health problems. This can help other people understand it is not contagious



**Have a clear list of medications** that you take, so you can tell any doctors, pharmacists or allied health professionals. This helps ensure new medicines do not interfere with other treatments



**Other therapies** such as voice-specialist speech pathology and chronic cough clinics may help you control your cough. Ask your doctor if other approaches might be helpful for you



**Have a clear plan to manage your coughing** so you know exactly what to do when it starts

# A holistic approach to managing chronic cough

Everyone is different, managing your cough often needs more than one approach. Follow the treatments prescribed by your doctor first, then include other approaches to help you take control of your cough.



**Click here** to find out more about **potential treatment approaches**

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

### Lung Foundation Australia services

- Information and Support Team
- Lung disease information resources
- Education webinars
- Silicosis Support Nurse and Social Worker
- Support groups
- Peer-to-peer connections
- Pulmonary rehabilitation information

### External links

- **Beyond Blue**  
[beyondblue.org.au/get-support/talk-to-a-counsellor](http://beyondblue.org.au/get-support/talk-to-a-counsellor)
- **Lifeline**  
[lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)
- **Speech Pathology Australia**  
[speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/find](http://speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/find)
- **NHS Breathing exercises**  
[northumbria.nhs.uk/our-services/respiratory-services/respiratory-speech-and-language-therapy/exercises](http://northumbria.nhs.uk/our-services/respiratory-services/respiratory-speech-and-language-therapy/exercises)

[lungfoundation.com.au](http://lungfoundation.com.au) | Freecall 1800 654 301 | [enquiries@lungfoundation.com.au](mailto:enquiries@lungfoundation.com.au)

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