

Medicines and other treatments for a long-lasting cough for adults

If you've had a cough most days for more than 8 weeks, it's important to have a yarn with your GP. Home remedies or cough syrup from the shop might help for a short time, but they won't fix the real cause if something bigger is going on.

Your treatment depends on what's causing the cough

A long cough can come from lots of things, like:

- Dust, smoke, or chemicals at work
- Nose or sinus problems
- Issues with your throat
- Reflux from your stomach
- Asthma, bronchitis, COPD or other lung sickness
- Heart problems
- Infections

2. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or chronic bronchitis

- Reviewing your medicines
- Quitting smoking or vaping
- Pulmonary rehab to help you clear mucus and breathe easier
- Having a plan to follow if symptoms get worse

3. Eosinophilic bronchitis

- Inhaled steroid medicines

4. Bronchiectasis

- Antibiotics
- Pulmonary rehab to help you clear mucus and breathe easier
- Having a plan to follow if symptoms get worse

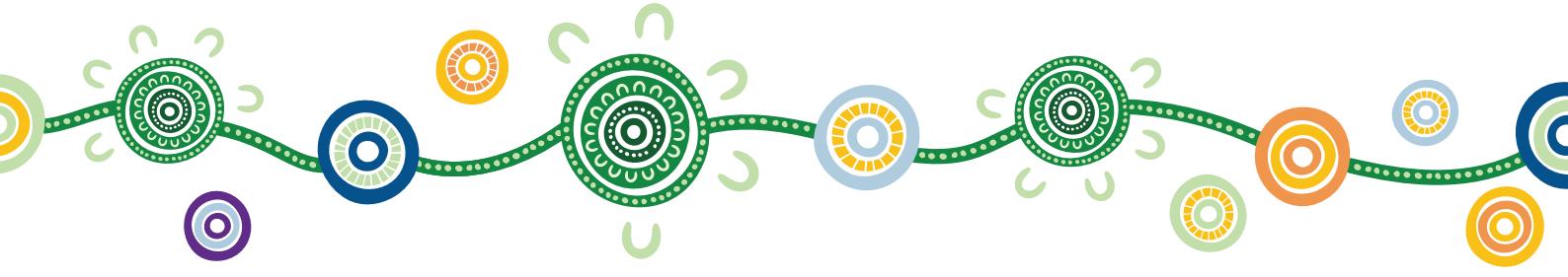
5. Interstitial lung diseases (ILD)

- Your GP will find what treatment options are right for you depending on your specific lung disease

Treatments for coughs linked to lung problems

1. Asthma

- You might need inhalers or changes to your current asthma medicines
- Your GP may show you the right way to use an inhaler (many people don't realise they're using it wrong!)



6. Lung cancer

If you have lung cancer, it's important to know that cancer treatments don't always help with coughing. If your cough isn't improving, your doctor may look for other causes or suggest different ways to manage it, such as:

- Breathing exercises to help reduce coughing
- Endobronchial brachytherapy (a treatment that uses strong, targeted radiation on tumours)
- Other medications that can help ease the cough

Treatments for other causes

1. Nose or sinus problems

- Nose sprays or salt-water rinses

2. Throat problems

- Your GP may send you to a speech pathologist who specialises in voice

3. Reflux (GORD) or swallowing problems

- Changing eating habits
- Not lying down or sleeping soon after eating
- Medicines to help settle your stomach

When doctors can't find the cause

Sometimes the cause stays unknown, even after tests. If this happens, a specialist can help you manage your cough with:

- Lifestyle changes
- Speech therapy
- Tweaking your medicines
- Trying different treatments to see what helps



Be careful with cough medicines

Before you buy cough syrup or tablets, have a yarn with your GP or pharmacist. Some cough medicines don't work for long coughs – and some can even make things worse.

Follow-up care

Treatments can take time, so keep track of:

- How often you cough
- What makes it better or worse
- Any side effects from medicines

Bring this info about your symptoms to your check-ups. It helps your GP understand what's working and what's not.

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.

Published: December 2025

© Lung Foundation Australia.

Medicines and other treatments for a long-lasting cough for adults

