Tips to help you manage a long-lasting cough for adults

Lung Foundation Australia

A long-lasting cough can wear you down – not just your body, but your spirit too. If your cough has been hanging around for more than 8 weeks, make sure you have a yarn with your GP.

These tips can help support the treatment your GP gives you

- Breathe through your nose – it keeps your throat moist and calmer
- Use a small hand-held fan on your face when you feel a cough coming
- Cover your mouth and nose when the weather is cold
- Sip water often, every 15–30 minutes
- Try steam inhalation (like a warm shower)
- Suck on menthol or honey lozenges (avoid flavoured or butter-based lozenges as they don't work as well)
- Yarn with your GP about natural options like ginger or honey
- Swallow gently when you feel a tickle in your throat
- Learn breathing exercises to settle your cough

Breathing exercises

- Whether you already have a cough or you're feeling ok, you can practice these exercises to help with or be ready for a cough

Stop Cough Technique

1. As soon as you feel a tickle, cover your mouth
2. Swallow once
3. Hold your breath for a few seconds
4. Breathe slowly through your nose for about 30 seconds with your hand over your mouth
5. Tell yourself, "I'm not going to cough"

Repeat if needed.

Things to avoid

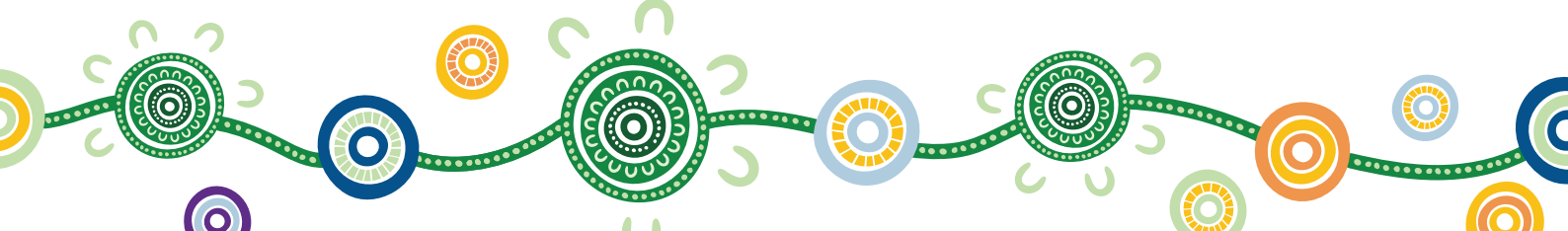
- Dust, smoke, chemicals, and very hot or very cold air
- Smoking or vaping **(for support to quit, talk to your GP or call Quitline on 13 7848)**
- Too much coffee or alcohol (tends to dry out your throat)
- Talking for long periods without resting your voice

Looking after your mental health

Stress, worry and feeling run-down can make your cough worse. Try:

- Slow, gentle breathing
- Mindfulness or grounding techniques
- Imagine a calm place – hear sounds of wind, smell of the sea, or see the sunlight through the trees
- Joining a support group, in-person or online

If you're interested in learning more about free support services available, we have included website links at the bottom of the last page.



Taking control

- Keep a little diary of when you cough
- Make a list of your medicines
- Know your cough plan so you're ready when symptoms start
- Let family, friends, and mob know that long coughs are usually not contagious. This helps reduce shame or worry

When to go to the Emergency Department

Get help straight away if:

- Your cough suddenly gets much worse
- You have severe shortness of breath
- You have chest pain
- You are coughing up blood
- You are feeling confused, weak, or dizzy

Everyone is different, so it can take more than one approach to manage a cough. Start by following the treatment your doctor gives you, then use other helpful tips to take control of your cough.

If you need further support, try reaching out to these free support services:

Beyond Blue

13YARN

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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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