

Understanding your long-lasting cough for adults

We all get a cough now and then. It's your body's way of clearing your chest. But if your cough hangs around for more than 8 weeks, it's time to have a yarn with your GP.

A long cough can knock you around – make you tired, keep you up at night, and make it harder to do your day-to-day things. It can also be a sign that something else is going on.

Why you should yarn with your GP

A long cough can:

- Make you feel worn out or stressed
- Mess with your sleep
- Cause aches in your chest or belly
- Make other health problems worse
- Sometimes be linked to things like asthma, reflux, infections, or heart or lung sickness

Even if you already have a lung condition, any new or ongoing cough still needs checking.

Step 1: Yarn with your GP

If your cough has lasted more than 8 weeks, book a visit. Before you go, jot down:

- When your cough shows up
- What makes it better or worse
- Any other symptoms

Bring a family member or friend if you want. It's always good to have someone by your side.

Step 2: Tests your GP might send you for

These tests help find the reason for your cough and should be covered by Medicare:

- A chest X-ray
- A lung function test (a simple breathing test) also known as spirometry

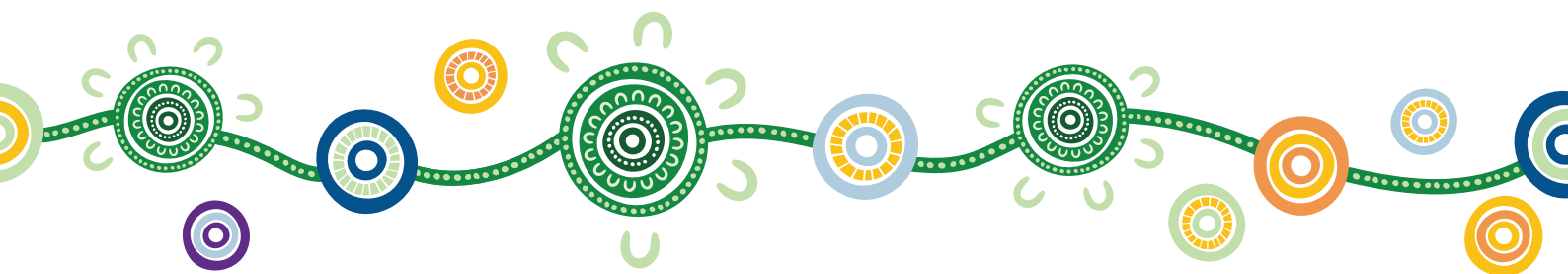
These tests help find the reason for your cough and should be covered by Medicare.

Tip:

If you notice your GP hasn't sent you for these tests, you can ask them why. You can say that you read these tests are recommended for people with chronic cough.

You might also get:

- A CT scan
- Blood tests
- A look inside your ear, nose or throat
- Allergy tests
- Tests to check for reflux from your stomach



Step 3: What may be causing your cough

Some common causes include:

- Nose or sinus problems
- Dust, smoke, or strong smells at work or home
- Acid reflux from your stomach
- Asthma or other lung problems
- Infections
- Side effects from some blood pressure tablets

Step 4: Treatment and support

Your GP might:

- Help you make lifestyle changes, like quitting smoking or staying away from strong fumes
- Suggest simple self-care, like sipping water throughout the day or breathing through your nose
- Give you medicines if you need them
- Link you with a specialist, like:
 - A lung doctor
 - An ear, nose and throat doctor
 - A stomach doctor
 - A speech pathologist

Sometimes they still can't find the exact cause. If that happens, they'll send you to a lung specialist for a closer look.

Step 5: Follow-up yarns

Your GP will tell you when to come back to check how things are going.

If you start feeling worse, or if you don't hear back about your test results, give your GP a call.

Remember:

- It can take time for things to get better. Ask how long you should wait to see an improvement.
- Make sure you go back to see your GP as recommended.

Questions you can ask your GP:

- Do I need a chest X-ray or a breathing test?
- What's causing my cough?
- What will help me get better?
- When should I come back for a check-up?
- Do I need to see a specialist?

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.