

COUGH SYRUPS

What is a cough?

A cough is an automatic (reflex) response to irritation of the airways in the lungs. The airways in your lungs can become irritated by a number of things - for example, too many secretions, infections, irritant gases, and allergens, or too much dust, or smoke.

Having a cough is the main symptom of an upper respiratory tract infection (URTI). However a cough can also be a symptom of other conditions such as asthma or other lung diseases. When you have a cough caused by an URTI, it is usually described as being either a chesty cough or a dry cough. If you have a chesty cough this usually means that your lungs are producing more phlegm (mucus) than normal, because you have an infection, and you are coughing up this extra mucus. If you have a dry cough this usually means that you are coughing a lot but there is no extra mucus when you cough.

What are cough medicines?

Cough medicines are a group of medicines that aim to either suppress a dry cough, or to help you to cough up the extra phlegm of a chesty cough when you have a URTI. Cough medicines that aim to help suppress a dry cough are sometimes called antitussives. Cough medicines that aim to help you cough up extra mucus are sometimes called expectorants.

There are no shortcuts with coughs caused by viral infections. It just takes time for your body to fight off the infection. In the meantime, you may still want to relieve the symptoms of the cough. Doctors won't prescribe antibiotics for coughs because they don't work against viruses. **However, if your cough has lasted longer than 3 weeks, seek medical advice.**

Although there's not much scientific evidence that cough medicines work, some ingredients may help with other symptoms of a cold. Make sure you read the label to check whether the cough medicine contains paracetamol, so you don't end up taking too much, for example by having paracetamol tablets as well as the cough mixture. Some contain alcohol.

Usually, cough medicines shouldn't be taken for more than two weeks without medical advice and people with diabetes should check the sugar content of cough medicines. Always check with your pharmacist before buying any medicines from the chemist or supermarket to see if they are safe to take with any other medicines you may be taking.

Tips to manage your cough at home

- Stay hydrated - drinking liquids also helps to keep mucous membranes moist.
- Try lozenges and hot drinks - some experts suggest menthol cough drops, which help numb the back of the throat and tend to decrease the cough reflex. Drinking warm tea with honey may also soothe the throat.
- Take steamy showers, and use a humidifier - A hot shower can help a cough by loosening secretions in the nose. Humidifiers may also help.
- Remove irritants from the air - perfumes and scented bathroom sprays may seem harmless, but for some people they can cause long-term sinus irritation. This can lead to a long-term cough because of the production of excess mucus. Take control by avoiding such scented products.