
THE "INFO"-HALER



TAKE IN THE INFORMATION

An easy to understand, informative newsletter for our patients of all ages from the
Allergy & Asthma Associates of Michigan, P.C.

COUGH

A cough is nature's defense mechanism for getting rid of extra fluid or foreign matter in the airways. It is also one of the most common symptoms for which a person seeks a doctor's care and for which prescriptions are written. For treatment to be effective, it is imperative that the source of the cough be identified. An untreated cough can lead to social, psychological, and physical problems.

A cough can be short term (acute) or long term (chronic). An acute cough would be a cough caused by a viral infection (e.g. cold or flu) or a bacterial infection (e.g. acute bronchitis or pneumonia). Treatment for a viral cough consists of cough medications to relieve the symptoms. A bacterial cough, however, requires a full course of antibiotic therapy (always take all antibiotics as prescribed until gone).

A chronic cough, on the otherhand, is defined as a cough that lasts more than three weeks. Chronic coughs tend to complicate a person's life. They can cause discomfort, hoarseness, insomnia, frequent vomiting, shortness of breath, and wheezing. In addition to these physical symptoms, they can also cause embarrassment, difficulty speaking on the telephone or in public, inability to sing, exhaustion, avoidance of quiet places (e.g. movies, church, lectures), marital complications (e.g. spouse moves to another room to get some sleep), etc. Individuals who experience chronic cough often fear the worse and think something more serious is wrong with them, or that others think something serious is wrong with them. They need to be reassured that relief will occur with treatment. Cough relief very positively affects these people's lives and helps to stop the social unease they experience.

It is sometimes difficult to diagnose the cause of a chronic cough. A chronic cough can be a sign of postnasal drip, chronic bronchitis or emphysema, asthma, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), or more serious conditions such as tuberculosis or lung cancer.

Postnasal drip is one of the most common complications of a cold. Inflammation of the sinuses and nose produce mucous that flows into the throat triggering a cough. Treatment is usually with antihistamines, decongestants, corticosteroid nasal sprays, mucous thinners, cough suppressants, and possibly antibiotics.

Emphysema is a permanent, irreversible disease of the air sacs of the lungs, and chronic bronchitis is an inflammation of the mucous membranes of the bronchiole tubes. These medical conditions can be accompanied by cough, fever, chest tightness, and wheezing. Treatment is generally with pain relievers to ease the fever and aches, bronchodilators to open the airways, anticholinergic metered dose inhalers to reduce airway spasms, and antibiotics to control bacterial infection.

Asthma is a condition caused by narrowing of the small airway passages (bronchioles) in the lungs. Asthma symptoms are dry cough with or without wheezing, cough at night, cough worsening in the morning or with exercise, cough triggered by laughter or crying, cough triggered by a tickle in the throat, mucous in airways, smoky areas, or cold air. Coughing makes the airways tighter and causes asthma to worsen. Treatment is generally with inhaled corticosteroids, bronchodilators, anticholinergic metered dose inhalers, and occasionally cough suppressants and antibiotics.

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a disease characterized by the movement of stomach acid back up into the lungs. The irritation from the acid produces coughing and hoarseness. Treatment generally consists of antacids, histamine blockers, and proton pump inhibitors. Individuals with GERD should eat at least two hours before lying down and favor an increased protein, low fat diet.

Chronic cough conditions should always be evaluated by a physician. The cause of chronic cough is often difficult to diagnose. Treatment should be followed precisely as directed, since treatment not only results in a reduction of symptoms, but also helps to confirm the accuracy of the diagnosis (e.g. if cough continues when asthma is under control, need to look for another cause of cough). With time, patience, and perseverance even the most difficult coughs can be managed and an individual's quality of life dramatically improved.

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