

**BITESIZED
TEACHING**



Coughs

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A cough is a natural action that has the important purpose of allowing someone to clear their throat of mucus or foreign irritants. Coughing is therefore something not usually done too frequently, although a number of conditions can cause more frequent bouts of coughing.

Persistent coughs usually go away within about three weeks, but should be investigated if worrying or troublesome, as there are a number of other conditions they may be a sign of.



Signs and Symptoms

Coughs become worrying and require investigation if they are;

- Persistent and last more than 3 weeks
- Deteriorate rapidly
- Are accompanied by chest pain
- The patient has also lost weight for no other reason
- The patient has swollen glands (side of the neck feels swollen and painful)
- Is accompanied by shortness of breath
- The patient has a weakened immune system, for example from chemotherapy or diabetes
- It's a 'productive cough' – there's green/brown phlegm, white phlegm, or blood



Causes

Most coughs are caused by viral infection. However, other causes include:

- Smoking
- Heartburn
- Allergies, such as hayfever
- Bacterial infections
- Mucus dropping down the throat from the back of the nose
- At it's most serious, a persistent cough can be a sign of a respiratory cancer



Ward Based Management

It is advised that to help treat a cough, the patient should rest and drink plenty of fluids. Other management strategies

- Clinical observations
- Obtain past medical history, particularly of coughs/colds
- Observe for any improvement/deterioration
- Is the cough productive? If so, collect sputum sample for microscopy culture and sensitivity
- Inform the doctor if the patient deteriorates