

## Do antibiotics help?

- Most coughs are caused by viruses. This means that antibiotics will not be effective against them.
- Even for a cough caused by bacteria, we know the body's own defences can usually clear the infection. It can take **up to 4 weeks** for coughs to go away completely.
- If you have to contact your medical practice for advice, your doctor or nurse will need to examine you before deciding with you whether an antibiotic or another treatment is needed.
- Everyone needs to use antibiotics wisely. Using them too much, or when they are not needed, encourages bacteria to become resistant. This means in the future the antibiotic may no longer be effective against the bacteria.
- Antibiotics themselves can also cause side effects such as diarrhoea, skin rashes and stomach upsets.

# COUGH?

Antibiotics are not the answer in most cases.

# SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?

If you would like to find out more about self-treating common health problems ask your pharmacist, call the free healthline on 08085 202030 or email [healthpoint@nhs.net](mailto:healthpoint@nhs.net)

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WHEN YOU'RE ILL,  
KNOW WHO TO TURN TO.



## What might be the cause of cough?

Coughing is the body's way of clearing your air passages, or as a result of an irritated throat. Most coughs and colds are caused by viruses. Other symptoms may include fever, headache, aches and pains.

The cough may persist after the other symptoms have gone, as the inflammation in the airways can take **up to 4 weeks** to settle.

## What can you do?

- Take a painkiller such as paracetamol or ibuprofen regularly according to the dosage instructions. This will also help with other symptoms you may have such as headache, general aches and pains. You can buy paracetamol as soluble tablets to make swallowing easier, or as liquid for children. Ibuprofen may not be suitable for everyone – check with your pharmacist before starting.
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially warm drinks.
- Suck 'cough' sweets or sip fruity drinks like honey and lemon.
- Cough up any phlegm you can.
- Extra pillows may help you sleep better.

- If you are a smoker, try to reduce the amount smoked as the chemicals and smoke irritation will make the symptoms worse.

## What if your child has a cough – what can you do?

- Don't force your child to eat if he/she is ill and off their food. Give them extra drinks or ice lollies and runny food like yoghurt.
- Give paracetamol, and follow the dosage instructions carefully – paracetamol is available as a liquid for younger children.
- To help babies or children to sleep better try raising the head of their cot or bed by 10 centimetres (4 inches).
- A child who lives with smokers has an increased risk of developing coughs.
- Remember not to give aspirin to any child under 16 years.

## How can your community pharmacy help?

- Your pharmacy team can advise on which over the counter medicines would be best to help you manage your symptoms.
- Your pharmacist can also check that any medication for your cough does not interact with any medication you have been prescribed by your doctor.

## When should you contact your medical practice for yourself or your child?

Contact your medical practice for **yourself** if:

- Your cough goes on for more than 3 weeks
- You cough up phlegm with blood in it
- You are short of breath
- Your breathing is wheezy, painful or loud
- You are over 65 years or have a chronic health condition
- You feel seriously unwell.

Contact your medical practice if **your child**:

- Is seriously unwell
- Has a high temperature and a cough that goes on for more than 3 days
- Is dribbling and can't swallow.

**You should contact your medical practice urgently if you are concerned that you or your child may be seriously unwell.**