

Chronic cough and throat clearing

Chronic cough is a cough that lasts eight weeks or longer in adults, or four weeks in children. If you have a persistent cough which lasts more than 2 weeks, you should have it investigated by a medical professional such as your GP or an ear nose and throat doctor (ENT).

Causes

Chronic cough or throat clearing can be caused by a range of things including allergies, reflux, asthma, laryngeal irritation, upper respiratory tract infection and post nasal drip. Usually cough resolves with resolution of the underlying problem, however sometimes cough will persist. This may be due to a developed habit, or ongoing irritation caused by the coughing itself. The perception that there is something that needs to be cleared is very strong, although very often when the larynx is viewed, there is no mucous there. Other causes of cough can be more serious and therefore assessment by an appropriate medical practitioner is essential.

Impact

Chronic cough can have a significant impact on your life. It can be disruptive to social interaction and work, it can interrupt sleep and even break ribs.

Treatment

Chronic cough is usually responsive to treatment by a Speech Pathologist. Therapy aims to reduce or eliminate coughing by substituting other behaviours. This in turn reduces laryngeal irritation and the need to cough. Reflux management is often a component of treatment and environmental management strategies are discussed. Often medical management of reflux is suggested. This is prescribed by an ENT, GP or other medical practitioner and usually includes some form of 'barrier' medication as well as one that reduces the acidity of the stomach contents.

Left untreated, chronic cough can result in damage to the vocal cords such as polyps or haemorrhage and changes to the voice (dysphonia).