



This material has been reviewed and approved by the patient partners with the Patient Voices Network.

Cough

Having a cough often means nothing serious. A cough is the body's natural response to something irritating the throat or airway which sends signals to the brain to get you to push air out of your lungs to get the irritant out. This can be due to many different causes such as a cold or flu, bronchitis, smoking, pollution, or asthma to name a few. You may also develop a persistent cough due to post-nasal drip, typically after a cold, that lasts for some time before resolving.

Most coughs resolve once the cause, such as a cold, gets better in 7 to 10 days but can last up to 3 weeks. Some coughs are so forceful that you cough so hard that you gag and sometimes vomit.



Designed by Freepik



When to Get Help

Go to the nearest Emergency Department or Urgent Care if:

- You begin to cough up blood.
- You develop shortness of breath or wheezing.
- You develop a fever of 40 °C (104 °F).
- You develop severe chest pain.

Go to a walk-in clinic, see your health care provider, or call 811 (711 for the hearing impaired) if:

- Change in sputum colour, earache, or sinus pain.
- Fever less than 39°C (102.2 °F) lasting 5 days or more.
- The cough is still present after 3 weeks, worsens, or has an unclear cause.
- You have unintended weight loss.

To Learn More:

- Ask your health care provider.
- Go to HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf or hard of hearing) or go online to www.HealthLinkBC.ca.

Recommended Follow-Up

- Follow up in __ days.

Name of Provider

Reason

Date/Time

Location

Contact Info

- _____
- _____

The information in this document is intended solely for the person to whom it was given by the health care team. This information does not replace the advice given to you by your health care provider.



EMERGENCY CARE BC
Provincial Health Services Authority

EmergencyCareBC.ca



How to Care for Yourself at Home

- Drink lots of fluids: honey or lemon juice in hot water or tea may alleviate a dry cough.
- Use a vaporizer, cool mist humidifier, or a steamy shower.
- Prop up your head with extra pillows at night.
- Cough drops or hard candy can help a sore throat.
- Avoid smoking and other irritants.

Medication

Start by taking acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fever, aches and sweats, if no allergies. Check the bottle of the medication you have purchased for instructions but we suggest:



ACETAMINOPHEN (E.G. TYLENOL[®], PARACETAMOL)

- 500-1000 mg every 4-6 hours as needed while awake, with water (max. 4000mg/day).

If you have liver disease or drink over 3 alcoholic beverages per day:

- Maximum dose: 3000mg per day.
- Do not use this medicine for longer than 5-7 days. Speak to your primary care provider if you need to use this for longer.

Be careful not to exceed the maximum dose when taking this medication with other medication that contain acetaminophen (e.g., Dayquil/Nyquil[®]).

IBUPROFEN (E.G. ADVIL[®], MOTRIN[®])

- 200-400 mg every 6-8 hours as needed while awake, taken with a small snack (max. 1200mg/day).
- Avoid taking this medication for longer than 5-7 days. See your primary care provider if you need to use this for longer.
- Avoid this medication if you are over 65, pregnant, or have the following conditions: severe liver or kidney disease, peptic ulcer disease or heart failure. Speak to your primary care provider before taking this if you have a history of stroke, GERD, inflammatory bowel disease, liver cirrhosis, or ischemic vascular disease.

Cough Discharge Instructions - continued

Do not take this with other NSAID medications, such as naproxen (e.g., Aleve®) or celecoxib (e.g., Celebrex®).

OTHER OVER-THE-COUNTER COUGH & COLD REMEDIES

Consult your pharmacist or healthcare provider before taking any additional medication, particularly if you are taking numerous medications or have underlying medical conditions. These medications have unclear benefits and can cause additional side effects (e.g., heart strain, drowsiness, etc.)

Including, but not limited to:

- Antihistamines (e.g., Reactine®, Benadryl®).
- Decongestants (e.g., Otrivin®, Dristan®).
- Cough syrups (e.g., Buckleys®).
- Nasal corticosteroids (e.g., Flonase®, Nasacort®).

Notes:

Additional Information

- HealthLinkBC: Coughs, Age 12 and over

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/coughs-age-12-and-older>

Reproduced with permission from Vancouver Coastal Health and Providence Health Care. Find this information sheet on the ECBC website:

https://emergencycarebc.ca/clinical_resource/patient-information-sheet/cough/

Tell Us What You Think!

Have feedback about this document? Use the form at: bit.ly/pdsfeedback



The information in this document is intended solely for the person to whom it was given by the health care team. This information does not replace the advice given to you by your health care provider.

Last Reviewed: September 25, 2024 | Page 3 of 3



EMERGENCY CARE BC
Provincial Health Services Authority

EmergencyCareBC.ca