

COUGH

A cough is a reflex action to clear the throat of any foreign bodies or particles, such as dust. But when you get a cold, the infected mucus from your nose drips down the back of your throat in a process called post-nasal drip. This post-nasal drip causes a type of cough that is not helpful at all.

Essentially there are two types of cough, a **DRY** or a **CHESTY** cough. Chesty coughs occur when mucus (also called phlegm or catarrh) builds up in the airways and the cough occurs so your body can clear the mucus.

Chesty cough mixtures such as Whelehans Special Cough Mixture contain an expectorant which liquefy the catarrh so it can be coughed up easier. Whelehans Special mixture has a 100 years of tradition and is non drowsy. There are other cough mixtures that cause drowsiness which can be used at night to help you sleep. Sugar free versions of cough mixtures are available for diabetics.

Dry cough mixtures contain ingredients such as pholcodeine, codeine and dextromethorphan. Dry cough mixtures comes in drowsy or non drowsy versions

There are also cough mixtures available which contain decongestants which are effective if you have a congested head as well as a cough

You should see your doctor if you experience any of the following symptoms with your cough:

- Phlegm which is green, yellow or rusty colour.
- Coughing up blood.
- Cough lasting longer than two weeks.
- Shortness of breath.
- Chest pain on breathing or coughing.
- Unexpected loss of weight.
- Regular night time cough.
- Harsh barking cough in children (croup).
- Whooping sound when breathing in after a fit of coughing (whooping cough).

Self Help

Stop smoking

If you are determined to continue smoking, at least stop for the duration of the cough. This gives the lungs an opportunity to try to clear the infection.

Steam inhalations

Steam inhalations can be very useful, particularly in productive (chesty) coughs. Simply putting hot steaming water (not boiling) in a basin, putting a towel over your head and inhaling the steam can accelerate the clearing of catarrh. The steam helps to liquefy lung secretions and the warm, moist air is comforting. You can add a little eucalyptus to the steaming water for extra benefit.

Increase fluid intake

Keeping a high fluid intake helps to hydrate the lungs and hot drinks can have a soothing effect.

Prevention

As so many different viruses can cause the common cold, no **vaccination** against it has yet been developed. Some prevention tips are:

- Wash your hands regularly and properly, especially after touching your nose or mouth and before handling food.
- Always **sneeze** and cough into **tissues** prevent spreading infection.
- Do not share cups or kitchen utensils with others. Use your own cup, plates and cutlery.

New guidelines for children

There are new guidelines that came out in 2011 restricting the sale of coughs and cold remedies to children under 6. The Irish Medical Board brought these guidelines out not because there was any safety concern in children under 6, but because they recognised that coughs and colds in children are frequent and normally self limiting, and there is no real evidence to support the use of these products in children under 6. So, due to these guidelines, pharmacies can no longer sell products containing cough suppressants, decongestants or antihistamines. Therefore, products like Benylin[®] for children, Robitussin or Sudafed can no longer be given to children under 6. Therefore, for a child under six, the best advice is rest, plenty of fluids. Most coughs and colds in under 6 will pass quickly but if is not improving or there is signs of a bacterial chest/nasal infection (green mucus is a sign), an antibiotic may be needed, however over 80 % of coughs and colds are viral so no antibiotic is needed.” For Chesty Coughs in children, Whelehans have recently introduced “Whelehans Paediatric Soothing Cough Syrup” which can help



clear catarrh in children aged 2 to 10 years. Whelehans Paediatric Soothing Cough Syrup is strawberry flavor and is sugar free. Nelsons Sootha Cough Syrup or Glycerin Honey and Lemon can be given for coughs in under 6 but are more soothing than cough relieving and therefore may give some relief from dry coughs. Saline drops or spray (eg. Calpol[®] Salin Spray) are a good and safe option to clear sinuses in children over 6. Decongestants rubs or drops that can be put on the child's chest or hankie beside the bed can be comforting for the child. Calpol[®] is still recommended for high temperature. For children over 6, there are many products and there is no one that stands out as best. There are some all in products that relieve coughs and unblock sinuses (eg) Benylin[®] coughs and colds (for dry cough with congestion) or Robitussin[®] Plus (for chesty cough with congestion). Double check the dose before giving as there are different doses for different ages.

Disclaimer: Consult with your healthcare professional before making any changes recommended especially if you have a medical condition

For comprehensive and free health advice and information call in to Whelehans or log on to www.whelehans.ie