

## **The causes of cough**

Cough is an involuntary action by the brain to clear a blockage or irritant from the body's airways. It is a common symptom of a number of diseases.

The most common cause of cough is a viral infection in the upper respiratory tract brought about by a common cold, or flu. A cold or flu usually causes excessive secretion of phlegm or mucous that flows from the nose into the airways, which further inflames the airways. This kind of cough usually disappears within a week.

In the case of a chronic cough, the common causes include asthma, rhinitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, gastroesophageal reflux disease (a condition that causes the stomach acids to move up into the esophagus triggering a cough), bronchiectasis, and heart diseases. Cough can also be a side effect of certain drugs such as ACE inhibitors, a kind of anti-hypertension medication.

Besides getting a detailed medical history from their patients, doctors sometimes need pulmonary function tests, chest X ray, chest CT scan and bronchoscopic tests to make an accurate diagnosis of the cough.

It is always important to deal with the disease that is causing the cough, although common cough mixtures are sometimes given to patients to relieve the irritation in the throat, not necessarily to cure the cough. Dry coughs are usually treated with antitussives which suppress the body's urge to cough, while productive coughs, or wet coughs, which produce phlegm are treated with expectorants that loosen the phlegm in the respiratory tract.

If a cough persists for more than two weeks, it would be advisable to consult a doctor.