



Child and Adolescent Health Specialists, PC

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COUGH

DEFINITION:

- The cough reflex expels air from the lungs with a sudden explosive noise.
- A coughing spasm is more than 5 minutes of continuous coughing.

CAUSE:

Most coughs are due to a viral infection of the trachea (windpipe) and bronchi (larger air passages). These infections are called tracheitis and bronchitis, respectively. Most children get this infection several times every year as part of a cold. Keep in mind that coughing clears the lungs and protects them from pneumonia. Bronchitis is not serious. The role of milk in thickening the secretions is doubtful.

EXPECTED COURSE:

Usually bronchitis gives a dry tickly cough that lasts for 2 to 3 weeks. Sometimes it becomes loose (wet) for a few days and your child coughs up a lot of phlegm (mucus). This is usually a sign that the end of the illness is near.

HOME CARE:

Treatments to loosen the cough and thin the secretions:

- Cough drops: Most coughs in children over 4 years of age can be controlled by sucking on cough drops freely. Any brand will do.
- Homemade cough syrup: For children under age 4 years, use ½ to 1 teaspoon of corn syrup instead of cough drops. Corn syrup can thin the secretions and loosen the cough.
- Warm liquids for coughing spasms: Warm liquids usually relax the airway and loosen the mucus. Start with warm lemonade or warm apple juice if your child is over 4 months old. For infants less than 4 months old, warm water can be used. Children over 4 years old can suck on butterscotch or peppermint hard candy or cough drops to soothe the irritated throat.

Cough suppressants: Cough suppressants reduce the cough reflex which protects the lungs. They are only indicated for dry coughs that interfere with sleep, school attendance, or work. They also help children who have chest pain from coughing spasms.

Cough suppressants should not be used for children under 6 years of age or for wet coughs.

A nonprescription cough suppressant is dextromethorphan (DM). It usually comes as a liquid in the strength of 15 mg per teaspoon. DM is also available as a cough lozenge and as a long-acting (12-hour) liquid. The following table shows the dosages of DM based on age:

Age of Child	Dosage of DM
7-12 yr	15 mg
Adults	30 mg

Humidifiers: Dry air tends to make coughs worse. Dry coughs can be loosened by encouraging good fluid intake by mouth and using a cool mist humidifier (for brief periods) in your child's bedroom. Don't add medication to the water in the humidifier because it irritates the cough in some children.

Common mistakes in treating cough:

Antihistamines, decongestants, expectorants, and antipyretics are found in many cough syrups. These are of unproven value for viral coughs and may carry the risk of side effects. Stay with the simple remedies mentioned above or, if your child is over 6 years of age, use dextromethorphan. Milk does not need to be eliminated from the diet, since restricting it only improves the cough if your child is allergic to milk. Also, never stop breast-feeding because of a cough.

CALL OUR OFFICE IMMEDIATELY IF:

- Breathing becomes difficult and is not better after you clear the nose.
- Your child starts acting very sick.

CALL OUR OFFICE DURING REGULAR HOURS IF:

- A fever lasts more than 3 days.
- The cough lasts more than 3 weeks.
- You have other concerns or questions.