

## A Guide to Cough Control

**Coughing is a reflex action that protects the lungs by clearing the throat of mucus or foreign bodies.**

### There are many reasons why we Cough:

- Respiratory Conditions
  - Acute infections including Pneumonia
  - Chronic conditions such as Asthma or Bronchitis.
- Pulmonary Emboli (Blood clots on the lungs)
- Smoking
- Heartburn or acid reflux
- Sinus problems and post-nasal drip
- Obstructive Sleep Apnoea
- Medications - e.g. some pills used for blood pressure or heart problems, and some inhalers
- Anxiety

### Good (Helpful) Cough:

We all need to cough from time to time.

A cough is a necessary and important way of keeping your chest and throat clear to ensure air can easily flow in and out of the lungs, and to help prevent infections.

### Bad (Unhelpful) Cough:

Coughing can be a learned behaviour, or bad habit, which can be exhausting, cause dizziness, headaches, chest and rib pain and a sore throat-all of which have a negative impact on everyday life.

A dry or hacking cough can cause irritation and inflammation of the throat triggering more coughing (it acts a little like an itchy bite or sting where the more you scratch it the more it becomes red, swollen and more itchy). The more we cough the more the trachea (windpipe) becomes inflamed and swollen making us cough more.

### Cough Control: It is possible to control most coughs

- Learning what is causing your cough will help you to control it. Sinus problems and post-nasal drip
- Treat any underlying conditions which may be aggravating the cough such as sinusitis, reflux and heartburn.
- Check with your Doctor whether your medication may be making you cough.
- Consider smoking cessation
- Look for triggers that may make you cough, such as strong smells, stressful situations and try to avoid them if possible.

## **Sputum**

If you are troubled with sputum (phlegm), breathing exercises can help you to clear the phlegm more efficiently and effectively, decreasing the need to keep coughing.

The Active Cycle of Breathing consists of a series of exercises: repeated in sequence several times before a cough to remove any sputum. The usual pattern is - Breathing Control - Deep Breaths - Huff  
If you have inhalers use your reliever medication before clearing your chest. See The Guide to Chest Clearance Leaflet on [www.physiotherapyforbpd.org.uk](http://www.physiotherapyforbpd.org.uk).

## **Techniques to help prevent an irritating cough developing:**

- Breathing - practice breathing control - try to breathe in and out through your nose, using your diaphragm (breathe into your belly) (see Your Guide to Good Breathing Leaflet).
- Posture - try sitting up straight, allow your shoulders to relax and slide your shoulder blades down your back.

## **Techniques to help control an Irritable Cough**

- Try sniffing in and out rapidly or swallowing when you feel the urge to cough.
- Cold drinks - take regular sips of cold water to soothe your throat.
- Sucking boiled sweets, ice cubes made from juice or water or frozen grapes
- Slow your speech, speaking in short sentences, and try to breathe in through your nose.
- Anxiety can cause you to develop a nervous cough, be aware of your triggers- i.e. public speaking.
- Medication - ensure you take all pills as directed  
ensure you rinse and gargle after using inhalers, particularly your preventer medication
- Avoid strong perfumes and other irritants which aggravate your cough.
- Avoid caffeine and spicy foods which may aggravate / cause heartburn.

**The more you practice the more confident you will feel managing your cough.**

## **When to seek medical help:**

- If you feel unwell
- If you are feeling more breathless than usual
- If your cough is different than usual, you may be coughing more or less than is usual for you,
- If you are worried about your symptoms and they are not getting better