

**BITESIZED  
TEACHING**



# Coughs

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A cough is a natural action that has the important purpose of allowing someone to clear their throat of mucus or foreign irritants. Coughing is therefore something not usually done too frequently, although a number of conditions can cause more frequent bouts of coughing.

Persistent coughs usually go away within about three weeks, but should be investigated if worrying or troublesome, as there are a number of other conditions they may be a sign of.



## Signs and Symptoms

Coughs become worrying and require investigation if:

- The cough is persistent and lasts for more than 3 weeks
- The patient's physical condition deteriorates
- The cough is accompanied by chest pain
- The patient has also lost weight for no other reason
- The patient has swollen glands (side of the neck feels swollen and painful)
- The cough is accompanied by shortness of breath
- The patient has a weakened immune system, for example from chemotherapy or diabetes
- It's a 'productive cough' – there's green/brown phlegm, white phlegm, or blood
- It is associated with a loss of smell or taste
- The patient also has a raised temperature



## Causes

Most coughs are caused by viral infection. However, other causes include:

- Smoking
- Heartburn
- Allergies, such as hayfever
- Bacterial infections
- Mucus dropping down the throat from the back of the nose
- At it's most serious, a persistent cough can be a sign of a respiratory cancer
- Viral illness



## Ward Based Management

It is advised that to help treat a cough, the patient should rest and drink plenty of fluids. Other management strategies

- Clinical observations
- Obtain past medical history, particularly of coughs/colds
- Observe for any improvement/deterioration
- Is the cough productive? If so, collect sputum sample for microscopy culture and sensitivity
- Inform the doctor if the patient deteriorates
- Advise the patient on proper handwashing techniques (check and educate if necessary)
- Advise and educate the patient as necessary on any further Public Health advice.