

PATIENT INFORMATION

Cough hypersensitivity

Over one in ten people in the UK will suffer from chronic cough and 20% of these cases will not respond to medical management¹. Intervention from a Speech and Language Therapist has potential to reduce the severity and frequency of coughing episodes.

What is a cough/ cough hypersensitivity?

When we cough, the vocal folds in our voice box clash together creating a burst of air. A cough is meant to:

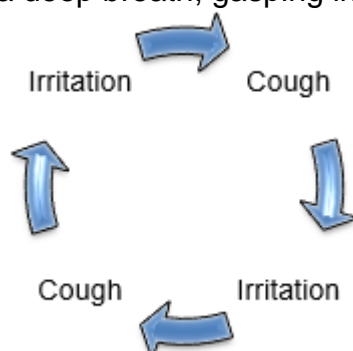
1. Stop harmful material entering the airway, i.e. smoke, mucus, food, etc
2. To eject mucus produced in the lungs, i.e. a chest infection.

Cough hypersensitivity is when a cough is triggered in response to an unharmed trigger or irritation., e.g. cold air. This is sometimes called laryngeal hypersensitivity (see separate hand out).

Prior to your referral to speech and language therapy, other medical professionals should have investigated other conditions that may be contributing to your cough, i.e. COPD, disordered breathing pattern, medications, etc.

Consequences of constant coughing

Coughing itself can develop into a vicious cycle. Once you cough you may feel the need to take a deep breath, gasping in this cold dry air can trigger another cough and the cycle continues.



The force of the vocal cords clashing together can also cause more irritation to the lining of the throat making them

Some people with cough hypersensitivity say it is unpleasant and can be isolating. For some it can lead to poor sleep, disordered breathing, loss of bladder control, anxiety, hoarse voice, vocal fold, etc.

Triggers

One of the first things to do to combat your cough is identify what triggers it. With cough hypersensitivity triggers are things that typically don't make people cough.

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| T | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cold air• Exercise/ exertion• Chemicals• Drying agents• Reflux• Talking | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Laughing• Dryness• Dehydration• Medication• Stress/ anxiety | <p>Some people can find it difficult to identify triggers, particularly if the overlap or are psychological</p> |
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Cough Suppression

There is no quick fix to stopping a persistent cough but your speech therapist will work with you to ensure your throat is healthy and provide you with breathing techniques to manage your cough (see leaflets).

Reduce irritation

1. Ensure you are well hydrated:

- Drink 1.5 to 2 litres of water each day, unless advised otherwise by your Doctor.
- Carry a water bottle at all times for regular sips of water.
- Avoid caffeinated/ alcoholic drinks.

2. Steam Inhalation (aim for 8-10 times per day):

- Inhale the steam from a cup of your favourite caffeine free hot drink/ cup of boiling water.
- Breathing shower steam when having a shower.
- Run hot water into a sink or basin and inhale the steam.
- Run a washcloth under hot water, wring it out, and hold it over your mouth and nose and breathe in.
- Try using a steam inhaler cup.

3. Medication

- Some medications have a drying effect on the throat, use steam to combat this.
- Rinse your mouth out and steam before and after using powdered inhalers.
- Use a spacer with your inhalers if you can.

4. Manage symptoms of reflux (see leaflet)

Cough distraction

- **Remind yourself there is no functional benefit to the cough; break the cycle!**
- **Take a sip of water;** this keeps the throat moist,
- **Hard/ dry swallow several times**
- **Sniff Puff Puff-** take a sharp sniff through your nose and blow out twice through pursed lips
- **Pursed lip breathing;** breathe in gently through your nose, then purse your lips making them into a narrow 'O' shape and blow out, as if trying to whistle or blow out candles, focus on trying to make the 'out' breath longer. This relaxes the throat muscles

Practice cough suppression techniques even when you are not coughing. This will help you remember to use the strategies effectively when you are coughing.

¹Ford AC, Forman D, Moayyedi P, Morice AH. Cough in the community: a cross sectional survey and the relationship to gastrointestinal symptoms. Thorax, 2006; 61(11), 975-979.

