

Physiotherapy Respiratory Department

COUGH SUPPRESSION

This leaflet has been designed to provide you with advice to help manage an ineffective cough. Coughing needs to be stopped or reduced if it is dry and does not clear any secretions. It is best to avoid lots of ineffective coughs because it can cause tiredness, stop secretion clearance, cause strain on your pelvic floor muscles and keep you awake at night.

When you feel a cough coming, ask yourself if it is wet or dry:

If it is wet:

- Use your normal airway clearance techniques, for example, active cycle of breathing.
- If you have not been taught how to clear your sputum please ask your physiotherapist for advice.

If it is dry:

The Stop Cough Exercise (for dry and tickly coughs)

1. As soon as you cough, or feel as though you are about to cough, put your hand over your mouth (this stops you taking a big breath through your mouth).
2. Swallow once.
3. Take a small breath in and out through your nose. Hold your breath for a few seconds.
4. Breathe slowly and gently for at least 30 seconds. Keep your hand over your mouth.
5. Tell yourself you are not going to cough.
6. Finally take a smooth, normal-sized breath through your nose and take your hand away from your mouth.
7. If you still feel a tickle in your throat, repeat the exercise from the beginning.

Techniques to help suppress frequent throat clearing

Throat clearing is another way of clearing secretions. Throat clearing causes the vocal cords to come together and pull apart forcefully, which can cause mucus production to protect the vocal cords. You may want to throat clear to get rid of this mucus, but frequent throat clearing can lead to your vocal cords becoming damaged and a continuous production of mucus.

It is important to break this habit through simple techniques.

- If you have reflux or post nasal drip, your GP may be able to offer medicine to treat this.
- Drink plenty of water. Two litres a day (not including caffeinated drinks) is recommended, unless you are on a fluid restriction recommended by your medical team.
- Ask people you see regularly to tell you when they hear you clearing your throat.
- When you feel you need to throat clear, swallow hard instead or take a sip of cold water and swallow hard.
- If you still need to clear your throat, try a forceful breath out (like a 'huff').

Use these prompts to help suppress an ineffective cough/frequent throat clearing:

- Tell yourself you do not need to cough
- Hard/dry swallow
- Hold breath for a few seconds/ count in head
- Breathe in and out through your nose
- For a nocturnal cough, avoid sleeping on your back
- Sip water
- Suck hard sweets, avoid menthol-flavoured sweet

There are no side effects to these techniques. Your physiotherapist can help guide you in finding the most effective method for you.

For further information or support:

Contact Physiotherapy Department on 01603 286990

Monday to Friday 09:00 to 17:00 Answerphone at other times