

Habit Cough

What is habit cough?

Habit cough is a cough that does not go away. If it lasts more than a month it is called a chronic cough. The cough continues even though there is no longer a medical reason for it.

What causes it?

Habit cough often starts after getting over a cold or a respiratory illness. The cough has become a habit. It continues even though the illness is gone.



What are the symptoms?

- Your child may not notice the cough, or it may not bother your child.
- It does not happen during sleep.
- It does not happen when your child is concentrating on a task or is distracted.
- It often sounds like a bark or a honk.
- It may happen many times per minute. This is called a coughing fit.

What tests might need to be done?

A chest x-ray may be done to make sure the lungs are clear. Other tests may be done to make sure asthma or allergies are not causing the cough.

How is it treated?

Habit cough is caused by a behavior (habit), not an illness. Cough medicines are not normally helpful. Treatment will focus on stopping the behavior.

- Some children can learn to control the cough by doing something else, like take a sip of water every time they feel the need to cough. This is called Suggestion Therapy.
- Sometimes, seeing a speech therapist will help.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any concerns or if your child has:

- A hard time breathing.
- A fever.
- Wheezing.
- A cough that gets worse. For example, it happens at night, gets worse with activity, or causes vomiting.
- Special health care needs not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.