

Cough and COVID-19

What you need to know

What is it?

Dry cough is one of the persistent symptoms of COVID-19. It's caused by irritation of the airways.

It does not produce any phlegm and serves no useful purpose. It's exhausting and often painful. It's also "self-perpetuating," meaning the more you cough, the more you irritate your airways, leading to more coughing, and so on.

Some people tend to have a wet cough, meaning they're able to cough up phlegm. This type of cough is productive, because it helps to clear out the secretions, freeing up the airways.

Strategies to help relieve your cough

Strategies to manage a dry cough

- Stay well hydrated by drinking plenty of water. However, if you have a specific medical condition that limits the amount of water you can drink, you need to follow your doctor's orders;
- Inhale steam. For example, pour hot water into a bowl and put your head over the bowl. If you feel comfortable, you can cover your head and the bowl with a towel;
- Rinse your nose with a saline solution to clear the phlegm from your upper airways;
- Add honey and lemon to a cup of hot water. Other warm drinks will also help to soothe the throat;
- If you do not have a drink on hand, but need to cough, try swallowing repeatedly. This can work in a similar way to sipping water;
- If you have a dry cough, exercise or activities that stimulate coughing are not recommended;
- Stopping smoking can improve the cough significantly.

Strategies to manage a productive cough

- Stay well hydrated by drinking plenty of water (unless restricted by your doctor);
- Inhale steam;
- Stopping smoking can improve the cough significantly;
- **Try lying in positions that are likely to drain the phlegm** (if you don't feel too short of breath or if your physical condition permits).

Postural drainage

Get into a **position** where your head is lower than your shoulders, which will trigger or exacerbate the cough. The goal is to make it easier for you to cough up the phlegm. Five minutes should be long enough. Repeat the sessions morning and evening.

- Lie on your side and place 2 or 3 pillows under your hips;
- Slowly inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Exhaling should take about twice as long as inhaling;
- Stay in this position for about 5 minutes.

Morning is the best time to do postural drainage, to help clear the phlegm that has built up during the night;

It can also be done just before bedtime to decrease coughing at night.



Forced expiratory technique (huffing)

This technique is used to clear secretions that are **ready to come out**:

- Sit in a comfortable position;
- Tilt your head slightly forward;
- Place both feet firmly on the ground.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose;
- Slowly exhale until there is no air left to come out;
- Take another deep breath.
- Cough twice, with your mouth slightly open:
The first time, to loosen the secretions;
the second time, to move the secretions up
your throat. Cough up the secretions into
a tissue;
- If the first attempt doesn't work, take a break
and repeat steps 4 and 5 once or twice more.

Contraindications:

- a. Do not do these exercises immediately
before or after a meal;
- b. Stop the exercises if you have any side effects;
- c. Do not do the exercises if you have:
 - Nausea
 - Acid reflux
 - Blood in your phlegm
 - A recent chest, spine, or rib injury
 - Wheezing
 - Severe shortness of breath

If you have any of the above symptoms, consult a health professional before doing these exercises. Most symptoms of long COVID improve over time. Be patient and kind to yourself.

Important:

Patients who are taking **prescription medication for lung conditions must follow the recommended dosage.**

If you use a bronchodilator, it will be easier to clear the phlegm if you take a dose before trying huffing or postural drainage exercises.

Reference:

Homerton University Hospital. (Mars 2021).
Post Covid-19 patient information pack. p.17-18
www.homerton.nhs.uk/download/doc/docm93jjjm4n6743.pdf?amp;ver=13452

Remember that applying
self-management strategies on
a regular basis is an effective way
of managing a cough.

If you have questions about long COVID, please email us at: readaptation.covid.cisssmo16@ssss.gouv.qc.ca.

Our mission

To maintain, improve, and restore the health and well-being of the Québec population by making accessible an array of integrated and quality health and social services, while contributing to the social and economic development of Québec.

Our vision

Accessible and efficient health care and services that adapt to the needs of Québécois.

Our goals

The CISSS de la Montérégie-Ouest achieves its goals through its innovative approaches and stands apart through:

- its exemplary offer of care and integrated services based on interdisciplinarity, accessibility, and adaptability to the needs of its population;
- its willingness to question and improve its professional, clinical, and administrative practices;
- its appreciation of its personnel and the implementation of human resource management practices;
- its strong relationships with its partners.

Our values

Our actions are guided by five equal and interconnected values: compassion, collaboration, commitment, confidence and consistency.