



**KAISER PERMANENTE®**

## Chronic Cough

First of all, it's important to remember that a chronic cough is not a disease; it's a symptom—a sign that something is irritating your breathing system. The cough may be evident early in the morning when you get up, late in the evening when you lie down, or at any other time of day. The point is that no matter what time of day you have it, your cough is becoming chronic if it lasts for more than a month.

A chronic cough can be caused by several different things. Most often it's caused by allergies, which irritate your nose and throat. Sometimes it's caused by smoke, sprays, fumes, or dust in your home or at work; these contaminants can additionally irritate your air passages. And a chronic cough may be caused by post-nasal drip, asthma, infection, lung disease, or heartburn.

You can often prevent a chronic cough by trying to avoid irritating your nose, throat, and lungs with contaminants. For instance, cigarette smoking often causes a chronic cough. Therefore, if you have a chronic cough and you are a smoker, you should stop smoking immediately. A chronic cough means that your smoking is damaging your breathing passages. It is also harmful to others as secondhand smoke.

Stomach acid can also cause a cough if it gets into the air passages. This can occur with or without the other symptoms of heartburn. So, if you think you might be bothered by stomach acid, don't lie down until at least two hours after eating.

If you have a chronic cough, drink lots of water and other fluids to help loosen phlegm and to soothe an irritated throat. Don't rely on cough medicine, though. The medication may reduce the cough, but it does nothing for the condition that causes the cough.

Proper treatment for a cough that lasts for over four weeks means seeking medical help. Your health care professional can examine you and search for the source of your cough. Proper medical attention early may prevent serious complications later. If your cough is accompanied by fever, shortness of breath, pain, or blood in your sputum, it's important to call for advice the same day.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at [www.kaiserpermanente.org/california](http://www.kaiserpermanente.org/california), then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button

- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION