

PATIENT INFORMATION**HABIT COUGH IN CHILDREN**

Habit Cough

A habit cough is a persistent, repetitive cough that occurs without any underlying medical condition. It can also be referred to as psychogenic cough, somatic cough syndrome, or tic cough. It most commonly affects school-aged children, typically those in upper primary or early high school and can affect both girls and boys equally.

Habit cough may typically develop after a viral illness but can continue for weeks, months, or even years in rare cases. There are treatments available to manage and resolve habit cough.

Types of Habit Cough

The classic habit cough is:

- **Loud**
- **Harsh**
- **Honking**
- **Barking**

This type most commonly affects teenage girls.

Another form of habit cough involves frequent throat clearing, which is more typical in boys aged 7 to 10 years. Habit coughs are usually dry and do not produce mucus.

Children with habit cough are usually comfortable between coughing episodes. Typically, habit cough occurs when the child is awake and may disappear when they are distracted or asleep.

Habit cough does not cause shortness of breath or wheezing. If these symptoms develop, it may indicate an underlying medical condition.

Parents play a key role in providing positive reinforcement, such as praising and encouraging, whenever there is a noticeable reduction in the coughing.

Habit cough is often linked to stress or anxiety. Encouraging your child to identify situations where their cough worsens may help pinpoint underlying stressors. Common triggers include experiences like bullying at school or during commutes to and from school.

Coughing can irritate the airways and trigger more coughing, **so breaking this cycle is essential**. Using cough sweets or taking small sips of water (particularly warm water) can help suppress the urge to cough.

The Stop-Cough Exercise (for Dry and Tickly Coughs) (Buteyko method)

1. When you cough or feel the urge to cough, place your hand over your mouth to prevent taking a large breath through your mouth.
2. Swallow once.
3. Breathe in and out gently through your nose, then hold your breath for a few seconds.
4. Continue breathing slowly and calmly through your nose for at least 30 seconds, keeping your hand over your mouth.
5. Remind yourself that you won't cough.
6. Finally, take a smooth, normal-sized breath through your nose and remove your hand from your mouth.
7. If the tickling sensation persists, restart the exercise from step 1.

Reinforce to your child that it is not their fault, and that it will get better.

Thinking of a cough as an itch can be helpful; ignoring the itch and not scratching it will help it go away.

Quick Tips:

- Tell yourself that you don't need to cough.
- Swallow if you feel the need to cough, with or without water
- Hold your breath for a few seconds while counting in your head.
- Breathe gently in and out through your nose.
- Suck on a hard sweet



If your symptoms or condition worsens, or if you are concerned about anything, please call your GP, 111, or 999.

Patient Experience

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

Feedback

Feedback is really important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will liaise with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaints procedure.

How to contact PALS:

Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: wah-tr.PALS@nhs.net

Opening times:

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that you may need to leave a voicemail message, but we aim to return your call within one working day.

If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.