

Cough

Different things may cause a cough. A cough may be a:

- sign of a chest infection
- symptom of a cancer in or close to the lungs
- side effect of [radiotherapy](#) to the chest
- side effect of some [chemotherapy](#), [targeted therapy](#) or [immunotherapy](#) drugs.

Always tell your doctor or nurse if you have a cough so they can find out the cause. Certain things, for example an infection, will need to be treated straight away with antibiotics.

If your coughing is caused by the cancer, then treating the cancer may improve the cough. Sometimes a short course of radiotherapy to the lung helps. If a cough is a side effect of treatment, it usually improves when treatment finishes.

Sometimes a cough and breathlessness can be caused by inflammation or scarring (fibrosis) in the lungs. This can be a late effect of radiotherapy to the chest. Drugs called [steroids](#) are sometimes used to treat this.

When a cough is ongoing it can be uncomfortable and upsetting. It may interrupt your sleep or interfere with eating. There are different things that may help.

Tips for managing a cough

- Always tell your doctor or nurse if your cough gets worse, or if you start coughing up mucus (phlegm). Tell them straight away if you cough up any blood.
- Ask your doctor or nurse if there are any treatments or medicines that could help your cough.
- If your doctor prescribes antibiotics, take them exactly as prescribed and finish the course.
- Codeine or morphine are drugs that are used to control pain. But doctors may also prescribe them to relieve an ongoing cough, even if you do not have pain.
- Ask your doctor if physiotherapy could improve your cough. A physiotherapist can show you the best way to clear your airways.
- If you have a dry, irritable cough, your doctor may prescribe a cough medicine to help.
- Sometimes inhaling steam or breathing in salt water (saline) through a small machine called a nebuliser can help. The machine turns the saline into a fine mist, so you can breathe it deeply into your lungs.

Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on be.macmillan.org.uk such as:

- [Lung cancer - easy read](#)
- [Managing the symptoms of cancer](#)
- [Understanding lung cancer](#)
- [Understanding radiotherapy](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line.

Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit macmillan.org.uk where you can [chat to us online](#).

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

Or if you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#).

Other useful contact details

- Asthma + Lung UK – visit www.asthmaandlung.org.uk or call 0300 222 5800
- Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation – visit www.roycastle.org or call 0333 323 7200.

Notes and questions
