



POST INFECTIOUS COUGH

Having trouble drinking that cold beer without coughing? Up to 25% of people suffer from a post-infectious cough – this is the cough that continues for 3-8 weeks after you have recovered from that cold or chest infection. It keeps you, or others, awake at night. It gets worse in air-conditioning, when you speak, go outside, laugh or have cold drinks.

Indeed some people get this post infectious cough every time they recover from a respiratory infection. Part of its definition is that it lasts eight weeks and resolves on its own. It is also associated with no abnormal findings including a normal chest x-ray. It is just that the cough drives everyone mad. It causes a lot of misery due to lost sleep, impaired performance, fainting or incontinence associated with the coughing attacks. There have even been fractured ribs and collapsed lungs.

The big three main causes of this persistent cough are:

1. Postnasal drip - this is the mucus running down the back of your nose, past your palate and onto your windpipe.
2. Asthma - unstable airways as a result of the previous infection.
3. Persistent airway irritation – this is most often after a viral respiratory illness and due to persisting upper airway inflammation and irritation that reacts to the cold air environment.

Other causes can include sinusitis, gastric reflux, ACE inhibitor drugs (used for controlling blood pressure), heart disease, heart failure and other lung conditions. So, if the cough persists you need to see your doctor.

Why does it last this long?

Because although the infection itself has resolved, it takes several weeks for the airway irritation to completely settle in some people. It is important to note that antibiotics do not work for this condition. If it is due to postnasal drip, it is important to dry this drip up with a nasal spray and possibly decongestants. The old fashioned first generation antihistamines also help this.

Cough suppressants may be useful and if it is the post-infectious cough, inhaled or oral steroid drugs from your family doctor have a high success rate.

My tips for helping the post infectious cough are as follows:

- Heat the bedroom to 25 degrees - it is not your body that needs to be warm, it is the air that you breathe that should be.
- Drink hot honey drinks (with or without alcoholic spirit) - the honey coats the throat and the spirit may suppress the cough.
- Find cold lozenges with the highest menthol content to suck on - this will heat up your throat and suppress the cough.

Remember that a cough that persists could be an indication of a more serious condition. It is important that if the cough does not go, for you to see your family doctor to check it out.