



CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN
SEVERE ASTHMA

Innovative solutions for severe asthma

Information for People Who Experience Chronic Cough and Excessive Throat Clearing

It is important for you to understand how cough works so you can better control your cough.

Inside your voice box (the larynx) are the vocal cords. The vocal cords are open when you breathe so that air can pass easily in and out of your lungs.

When you swallow food, drink and saliva your vocal cords gently and firmly close together. This protects your airways by preventing food, drink and saliva from entering your lungs.

When you speak your vocal cords vibrate together in a closed position.

When you cough and when you clear your throat your vocal cords slam together. Frequent coughing and throat clearing can irritate and damage your vocal cords.

4 Important Facts About Cough

1. Cough Protects the Body

Cough protects your body by clearing your throat, chest and lungs of things that irritate or harm your body, such as dust, phlegm and mucus. Your cough protects your body when food goes down the wrong way or you have a chest infection.

2. Cough Is Triggered by Irritation

Irritation in your vocal cords, throat or lungs can make you cough. Sometimes the cough is automatic but other times the cough is deliberate when the irritation is felt in the throat. Coughing can become a vicious cycle where irritation leads to coughing, coughing causes more irritation and this irritation leads to more coughing.

3. Coughing Is Not Always Necessary

When cough becomes chronic the cough occurs in response to irritation even though there is nothing to be cleared from the chest or lungs. There is no benefit to this type of coughing. Instead it increases the irritation in the throat and leads to more coughing.

4. Coughing Can Be Automatic or Deliberate

Your cough can be strong and automatic while at other times you can suppress a desire to cough. Sometimes you may cough deliberately to try to get rid of irritation.

How Speech Pathology Can Help Your Cough

1. Increase Conscious Control Over Your Cough

Speech pathology treatment increases the ability to voluntarily control your cough. Although irritation may build up in the throat it will eventually be possible to control or suppress the cough when you feel that something needs to be coughed up.

2. Reduce Irritation That Triggers Coughing

Speech pathology treatment also reduces the degree of irritation in your throat and airway. A cough is triggered once irritation builds up to a certain level. Reducing irritation in your throat and airway will reduce coughing.