

Good cough, bad cough

By: Dr. John P. Glynn and Prof Rashid Bhikha

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Overview

Coughing is a Physis response: a natural in-built protective reflex to clear the airways of dust, smoke particles, microbes and excess mucus. However, a chronic cough is a symptom of an underlying disorder. It is a regular partner of colds and flu, breathing ailments such as asthma and bronchitis, serious lung diseases (tuberculosis and cancer, for example), and sometimes the presence of small foreign bodies. It can also be a symptom of several unrelated ailments such as heartburn, ear problems and a failing heart. Using certain prescription drugs can bring about coughing. Most people with a cough will seek out cough medications such as cough suppressants and expectorants; however, there seems to be only a minor benefit from these. Relief of the cough is best achieved by traditional remedies based upon honey and certain herbs, and reasonable changes to lifestyle.

Note: According to Tibb, most coughs arise from changes to the environment that promotes qualitative changes in the sufferer. They usually go within a week, due to the efforts of Physis.

Types of cough

Coughing can conveniently divided into two basic types:

- **Wet coughs:** Are a common symptom of respiratory ailments such as influenza, common cold and acute bronchitis. This type is called a *chesty* or *productive cough*, as it helps bring up phlegm (*sputum*) from the lungs and airways. The wet cough is worse in the early morning or when talking.
- **Dry coughs:** This type is called a *hacking* or *non-productive cough*. It is usually due to inhaling dust, tobacco smoke, exhaust or fire fumes, or taking certain drugs such as the ACE inhibitors. It can also occur in post-nasal drip, and as part of allergy to cat dander and plant pollens. It often occurs in the early stages of a developing cold, and in people with chronic bronchitis (*smoker's cough*).

Coughs can be *acute coughs* (one-off and occasional) usually due to irritating substances being breathed in; and *chronic coughs* (which repeat regularly, and last more than three weeks).

Note: An acute, short term cough usually goes with an upper respiratory tract infection. A chronic, persistent cough is usually due to chronic bronchitis or post-nasal drip.

Coughing in children

Children often cough due to a breathing problem such as asthma, an inhaled foreign body, an infection like a cold or tuberculosis (TB), or as a result of an ear infection. Identifying the source of the cough is the key to its treatment.

Children are prone to three types of cough:

- **Chronic cough.** This can be quite distressing. The child coughs for a prolonged period, with little relief or sleep. Unfortunately, the child's parents or carer are usually disturbed and sleep-deprived, which often results in frustration, impatience or fear. This can aggravate the situation for the child.
- **Whooping cough (pertussis).** The source of this alarming cough is a bacterial infection. The cough is severe, and can be fatal if not treated early and properly.
- **Croup.** This affects children between 6 months and 3 years, It results from inflammation of the airways brought on by an acute infection, usually a day or so after the onset of a cold. The cough has a harsh, barking quality, and breathing is noisy and laboured.

Why treat a cough?

Most coughs go away of their own accord. However, a persistent cough needs attention. In children especially, a prolonged bout of coughing often leads to sudden vomiting, especially after a meal. A fit of coughing can lead to fainting, due to decreased blood flow to the brain. In adults, usually women, an obstinate cough can bring about urinary incontinence. In people with previous asthma or similar, shortness of breath develops, due to air entering the pleural cavity.

Note: A healthcare provider should be seen if (a) the cough lasts longer than two weeks; (b) the coughing becomes more severe; (c) blood is coughed up; (d) chest pain develops.

Tibb's view of coughing

Tibb sees coughing as a natural protective Physis reflex, whose function is to clear the airways of potentially damaging irritants such as microbes and particles, or from a build-up of fluid due to, for example, post-nasal drip. However, when the cough persists for longer than it needs to, it becomes a symptom of an underlying disorder which disturbs the inner harmony of the body's qualities. The two basic types of cough – wet and dry – are actually related to different combinations of qualities: a wet cough is linked to *coldness* and *moistness*, and a dry cough to *coldness* and *dryness*. This explains why people with a phlegmatic temperament are more inclined to a wet cough, whereas a melancholic person is more likely to develop a dry cough.

In view of this, Tibb's approach is what it is for all ailments – first, relieve the symptoms; then identify the underlying problem; then treat appropriately. Initially, the cough is relieved by various measures. For example, if a cold or flu is present, then treatment is directed at alleviating these, rather than merely suppressing the cough. In those troubled by a *wet* cough, measures to increase heat and dryness are applied, and for a *dry* cough, measures to increase heat and moistness.

Note: Whatever treatment is selected must support Physis in its attempt to restore harmony in the person's profile.

Modifying the Lifestyle Factors are the principal measures favoured by Tibb.

These include:

- **Environmental air and breathing.** Inhaling steam from a bowl of very hot water to which blackseed oil or menthol crystals have been added is a time-proven way of soothing any cough. Taking a hot shower or bath also

helps, as will using a humidifier. For the longer term, practicing **Tibb breathing exercises** (slow and deep breaths) greatly benefits the sufferer.

- **Food and drink.** For a *wet* cough, the patient should select hot and dry foods such as chicken and eggs, garlic, and onions, flavoured by hot spices such as ginger, pepper and turmeric. Rice and milk dishes should be avoided. For a *dry* cough, hot and moist foods should be favoured, such as lamb and spinach, also boosted with hot spices.

Note: For both types of cough plenty of fluid should be consumed, whether plain water for a wet cough, or broths and hot beverages containing honey for a dry cough.

General ways to treat the cough

Most coughs will go away naturally in time, or can be treated effectively by simple measures. If the patient (or the parents) feels the need for active treatment, there are three available routes:

Natural measures

- Gargling with salty water relieves the discomfort caused by a dry cough.
- Drinking hot milk mixed with raw honey can often relieve a dry cough.
- Cough syrup made of lemon juice and honey (2:1) taken several times a day is effective for most coughs.
- Breathing exercises. Tibb offers a selection of these. Breathing deeply for several minutes helps.
- Inhaling steam from a bowl of hot water, to which menthol has been added.
- Standing in a steamy shower.
- Menthol cough drops numb the cough reflex.

Herbal medicine

- Ginger is one of the most popular natural cures for a cough.
- Lemons can be used in a variety of ways for curing coughs. Lemons have properties that reduce inflammation. Sucking a slice of lemon sprinkled with black pepper is a well-tested method for cough relief.
- The herb turmeric, mixed with water, black pepper, cinnamon and honey, has a therapeutic effect on coughs, particularly a dry cough.
- Garlic and onions help treat coughs. The former is boiled in water, and honey added to taste. The latter is cut and the fumed breathed in.

Note: Cough / cold medicine should be used cautiously in children younger than 5 years

Drug therapy

The main groups of conventional drugs used to treat a cough are:

- *Cough suppressants* act upon part of the brain (*medulla*) to inhibit the coughing reflex. They include drugs such as dextromethorphan and codeine. Some antihistamines are also used, as they have a mild, beneficial sleep-inducing effect. They should be used wisely, mainly at night to allow the patient to sleep. As a productive cough is beneficial, it should not be suppressed.
- *Expectorants* are designed to make it easier to bring up sticky, dense phlegm. They include guaiphenisin and ammonium chloride. Plenty of fluid should be taken as well.
- Sometimes *antibiotics* are used for a cough. However, these drugs are only effective against infections by bacteria, not viruses. The only rationale for antibiotic use is when bacterial super-infection occurs, or is threatening to do so.

Herbal treatment of coughing

Virtually every culture has its own select herbal remedies for relieving the annoyance and distress of a cough. Here is a selection of popular ones which are readily available to sufferers in Southern Africa:

- **Licorice Root Tea:** this has an anti-inflammatory effect which soothes the irritated airways and thins out obstinate phlegm.
- **Thyme Tea:** this relaxes the smooth muscle of the upper airways, so opening them up to aid breathing.
- **Ginger and Peppermint Syrup:** The hot spice ginger helps move thick mucus, and relieves congestion in the airways. Peppermint also helps this expectorant action, and soothes the back of the throat.
- **Black Pepper Tea:** This traditional Eastern remedy for a wet cough stimulates blood flow to the congested airways, and promotes mucus mobility. Combined with raw honey, it also has an anti-microbe action.

Tibb herbal medication for coughs

Tibb offers two tried and trusted remedies for treating a persistent cough:

- **Kofcare syrup** acts on the inflammation arising from irritation of the airways by a dry cough. It helps restore harmony in qualities by opposing the cold and dry imbalance. The honey in the syrup soothes the lining of the upper breathing passages.
- **Chest-eeze syrup** is particularly effective in dampening down coughing triggered by excess mucus, as in bronchitis and other respiratory disorders. It acts to increase the heat quality.
- **Septogard lozenges** has anti-inflammatory and expectorant properties, indicated for sore throat and cough relief.

Summary

Most of us regard a cough as more of a nuisance than a health issue, an unwelcome partner to a cold, allergy or smoking. A cough, especially in a child, interferes with life's daily activities and sleep, and adds the risk of spreading the microbes linked to colds and flu. Coughing is a natural Physis reflex reaction to clear the airways of invasive microbes, mucus from post-nasal drip, plant pollen, and irritant particles such as dust, which may induce inflammation. Most coughs go away after a few days, unless they signal an existing disease such as heartburn or heart failure. Unfortunately, if coughing outlives its usefulness it can inflame the delicate tissues of the breathing passages. Tibb recommends keeping hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids, especially if a dry cough is present, supported by simple measures such as steam inhalation and breathing exercises. Better sleep hygiene is also recommended. If the cough persists, the use of herbal remedies combined with honey is advocated. Tibb offers a couple of herbal remedies which help the cough sufferer. There are many and varied ways of dealing with a cough naturally, from steam inhalation and honey, to using lemon and one of a vast array of herbs. Whatever measures are adopted, support for Physis is essential.

Further Reading

Tibb and cough: <www.tibb.co.za/ailments.html>

Tibb and the Lifestyle Factors: <www.tibb.co.za/articles/lifestyle-the-bedrock.pdf>

Physis and health: <www.tibb.co.za/concepts_tibb.html>

Coughing in children: <www.medicinenet.com/childrens_cough_causes_and_treatments/article.htm>

Natural remedies: <<http://everydayroots.com/cough-remedies>>

Honey for coughs in children: <www.cochrane.org/CD007094/ARI_honey-for-acute-cough-in-children>

General review of coughing: <www.medscape.com/viewarticle/572308>