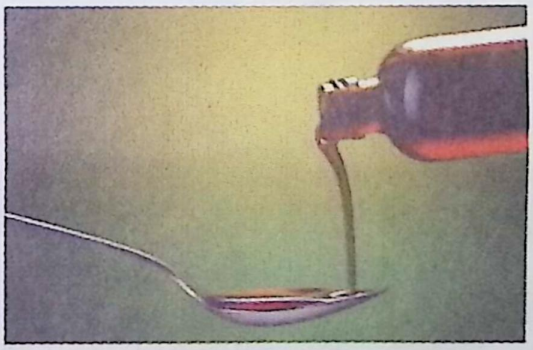
coughs with wheezing, coughs that routinely worsen when you go to certain locations or do certain activities, or coughs that improve with inhalers or allergy medications.

The signs and symptoms of the chronic cough can be hard for doctors to assess, because many causes of the chronic cough have overlapping signs and symptoms.

If your cough is related to environmental irritants, it will worsen when exposed to the offending agent. If you have an environmental allergy, your cough may improve when using allergy medications. If you have a smoker's cough, it may improve if you stop smoking and worsen with increased smoking.

If you have a chronic lung disease such as asthma, emphysema, or chronic bronchitis, you may have a persistent cough or a cough that worsens with certain locations or activities. You may or may not have sputum with your cough and often have improvement in your cough with the use of inhaled or oral steroids, or other inhaled medications.

If your cough is caused by chronic sinus infections, chronic runny nose, or chronic postnasal drip, you will often have the signs and symptoms associated with these conditions. You may also notice that your cough worsens when your problem worsens, and often your cough will improve when the underlying problem is treated.



If your cough is associated with medications, such as angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors, the cough will begin after starting the medication in question. The cough is often dry and improves when the medication is stopped.

A cough associated with GERD is often associated with a sensation of heartburn. This type of cough worsens during the day or when you lie flat on your back. Furthermore, a sizable minority of people with a cough caused by GERD will note no symptoms of reflux, but most people will report improvement in their cough when GERD is treated properly.

If your cough is a warning sign of an underlying cancer, you may have a group of symptoms. If lung cancer or a cancer of the air passages is present, you may cough up blood. Other signs and symptoms that may warn of a cancer include worsening fatigue, loss of appetite, unexplained loss of weight, or decreased ability to swallow solid or liquid foods.

Cough Treatment -- Self-Care at Home

Home care of the cough is often directed at treating its underlying cause.

If you have an acute cough and have not been to the doctor, you may attempt to use over-the-counter cold remedies to relieve your symptoms. If a common cold or flu is suspected, these may provide relief until the infection gets better on its own. Acute coughs that are caused by allergies are often relieved with allergy medication, and coughs due to environmental irritants will respond to elimination of the agent.

Home care of the chronic cough with a known cause is directed at treating the underlying cause of the cough. This should be done in close consultation with your doctor or with a specialist. Although not every chronic cough can be eliminated, many people can find relief of their cough by following their doctor's recommendations closely.

Next Steps -- Follow-up

The best plan for follow-up care for a cough of any nature is to discuss when and where follow-up should occur with your doctor. Acute coughs typically get better on their own and often will not need follow-up. Many chronic coughs will take weeks to months to get better even when treatments are followed closely; thus, follow-up should be arranged based on this time schedule. For coughs that do not get better with standard treatments, referral to a specialist may be needed to decide the cause and best treatment.

Prevention

Prevention of a cough is based on avoiding the medical problems that cause cough.

The most important aspect of prevention is to stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke, particularly for people with asthma, chronic lung disease, and environmental allergies.

For people with GERD, prevention is aimed at diet modification, sleeping with the head of the bed elevated, and taking all medications as prescribed.

For any person who is on medication for a chronic lung disease, the best prevention is strict adherence to the doctor's prescribed treatments.

Outlook

The prognosis for a cough will vary depending on the underlying cause. After the cause has been addressed, most acute coughs will get better within 2-3 weeks. People who smoke during their cough can expect a longer period before they are completely better. People with chronic cough often have more varied results, and people with chronic lung disease often have periods of resolution in addition to periods of worsening of the cough. Again, smoking will make a chronic cough last longer and should be avoided.

Source: emedicinehealth.com