# Cough

**A cough is most often caused by viruses in adults and can be treated without seeing a medical provider ...**

Coughs may be present with other symptoms of an upper respiratory tract infection (cold) such as fever, sore throat and nasal congestion. Coughs due to a virus tend to resolve on their own within 7–14 days. However, some coughs last 3–4 weeks.

## Symptoms

- Cough that may produce mucus (mucus may be clear, white, yellowish-gray or green)
- Other symptoms of the common cold (including nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat)
- Fatigue

## Self-care measures

- Rest.
- Hydrate with plenty of water (avoid alcohol and caffeine) and herbal tea with honey.
- Avoid cigarette smoke.
- Use a humidifier and/or take warm showers.
- Use non-prescription cough medication containing Dextromethorphan and/or Guaifenesin.
  - Such medication is helpful for about 60% of people depending on the reason for the cough; prescription cough medication only helps 65-70% of people with a cough.
  - *If you take medication for anxiety or depression, check with a pharmacist prior to taking cough medication, as it may be contraindicated.*
- Use Cornell Health self-care guidelines for symptoms of Upper Respiratory Tract Infection as needed.

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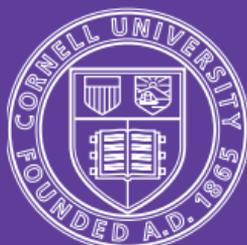
- Special note: Take care to check for ingredient overlap between products (if you're not sure, check with a pharmacist).

## Limit spread to others

- Cover your cough using the crook of your elbow.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Avoid intimate contact.
- If you have a fever, stay home and away from others until fever-free for more than 24 hours (temperature less than 100°F without medication)

## When to seek care from a medical provider

- Cough lasts more than three weeks
- Cough prevents you from sleeping
- Chest pain
- Cough produces blood (more than streaks in the mucus)
- For wheezing or shortness of breath
- Fever (greater than 101°F) with significant cough for over 72 hours

To make an appointment at Cornell Health, call 607-255-5155 during business hours, or go to myCornellHealth (from *health.cornell.edu*) and find a time that works for you.

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# health.cornell.edu/self-care