

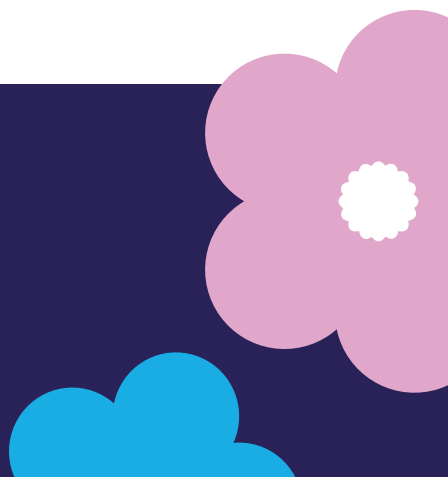
Coughing



MESOTHELIOMA UK

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Introduction

This booklet talks about coughing in mesothelioma and gives advice on how to manage it.

Coughing is a common symptom of mesothelioma. We think it affects nearly half of all mesothelioma patients.

It can be difficult to cope with, causing physical symptoms such as pain, tiredness and vomiting as well as emotional symptoms like anxiety, embarrassment and stress.

Causes

The exact causes are not known. It is likely several different reasons for coughing exist, even within the same person. Some possible causes are:

- Fluid around the lung (a pleural effusion).
- Damage to the nerves supplying the lining of the lungs (pleura).
- Chest infections, which people with mesothelioma are more likely to have.

“Coughing at night time seems to be the worst... when I’m lying there...and it can be a prolonged bad cough. I could be sick, but I’ve not been. But it’s that sort of feeling that you just cough and cough and cough. The cough is the worst thing”

Causes related to treatment

Both radiotherapy and chemotherapy can cause coughing. This is because both these treatments can cause inflammation and scarring of the lung.

Usually, this is mild and settles down quickly following treatment avoiding any further intervention.

Physical effects

We know that a cough can affect mesothelioma patients in a number of ways, making it much harder to manage even daily tasks such as washing and dressing.

People often say that coughing makes them feel very tired, this can be due to physical strain from coughing or because the cough keeps them awake at night.

Some find coughing causes pain their chest or elsewhere in the body.

Breathlessness is often made worse by coughing. That can be very frightening sometimes because a bout of coughing can make it hard to catch your breath.

Sometimes coughing causes retching and vomiting. This can be very embarrassing if you are in a public place.

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Dizziness can sometimes be caused by coughing.

Very rarely, people can pass out if the cough is severe. This can be very frightening.

Some people find they leak urine when they cough. This tends to be more common in women but can occur in men too. It can be embarrassing to talk to health care professionals about this, but please do, as they can often help.

You may find coping with the physical effects of your cough difficult. It is important to discuss any physical symptoms with your doctor or nurse so they can help you find the best way to manage them.

Emotional effects

Coughing can cause significant distress. People worry that if the cough worsens, it may be because the mesothelioma is getting worse or because treatment for the disease is not working. Although this is not always the case, it is hard not to feel anxious.

Coughing can also be a reminder of the diagnosis and an outward sign of illness to others.

This can be especially difficult for those who want to keep their diagnosis private or protect their carers from anxiety.

Anger and irritability relating to the cough are

common. Pain and tiredness often make these feelings worse.

If you recognise some of these symptoms in yourself, it is important that you speak to the doctors and nurses looking after you to ensure that you have the support in place to minimise these symptoms where possible.

Social effects

Sometimes the fear of coughing in public spaces is a cause of anxiety.

You may find it hard to pursue the activities you enjoy with your family and friends.

Even talking to family or friends on the phone can

be difficult since coughing interrupts conversations and the effort needed to talk can lead to more coughing.

This can restrict your social life and make you feel isolated.

Managing your cough

There are lots of things you can try to help relieve your cough:

Controlling coughing and throat clearing

Repeated coughing or throat clearing can cause inflammation and irritation of the airways, which can make you cough much more easily.

Because of this, techniques that help to

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suppress the cough can eventually lessen the need to cough.

Take a few days monitoring how often you cough and/or clear your throat.

Try to remember how it feels just before you cough.

Once you are aware of how it feels just before you cough or clear your throat, try one of the following techniques:

- 1) Take a sip of water
- 2) Sniff then swallow
- 3) Swallow

It may take a few attempts at the controlling technique for a few seconds relief before the

urge to cough returns. The key is to persevere. If the urge to cough returns, repeat again. You can use a combination of approaches. There is no right or wrong approach.

Choose whichever technique you feel most comfortable with and whichever works best for you. Once you have learnt how to control your cough a few times, it will become easier.

Avoidance of coughing triggers

Coughing can be triggered by a number of things. They vary from person to person. These might include steam, smoke, strong perfume, cold air or even aerosols. It is not

always easy to avoid situations that lead to your cough being triggered.

However you can try some of the following techniques:

- 1) Wear a scarf over your mouth when going outside on a cold day
- 2) Where possible, use alternative preparations to aerosols such as roll-on deodorants
- 3) Use water that is slightly cooler than normal to reduce the steam from a bath or shower.
- 4) Use scent-free soaps rather than strongly perfumed soaps to wash.

5) Consider changing your washing powder to a non scented washing powder and avoid using strongly scented fabric conditioner.

6) Avoid smoky environments

Clearing phlegm

Some people cough more because it is hard for them to bring up phlegm.

Sometimes it is because the phlegm is very thick. Loosening the phlegm can help, some things you can try are:

Steam inhalation

Take a large clean bowl and fill it with water that has just boiled. Sit at a table with the bowl of water placed in front of

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you. Place a large towel over your head and around the sides of the bowl. Breathe in the steam from the bowl for a few minutes.

Huffing

Take a big deep breath, filling the lungs as completely as possible. Blow the air out in forceful bursts through an open mouth while saying “huh,” as if you are blowing steam onto a mirror. Repeat as many times as needed to clear the loosened mucus from the airway.

Easing coughing at night

It can be very difficult to sleep well at night when you have a cough.

Sometimes the cough is made worse by certain positions such as lying flat in bed or lying on a particular side.

Try sleeping in different positions, including propping up your head with more pillows.

Simple cough remedies

Although it is possible to buy many different over the counter cough remedies, there is little research to suggest that any are effective.

However some patients find the following helpful:

Menthol drops

These can be bought to use with steam inhalation. Use according to the manufacturer’s recommendations.

Cough sweets

Several cough sweets are available to buy. We cannot recommend any specific brand. We suggest trying different types to see if any work for you.

Honey and lemon drink

Squeeze the juice of half a lemon and pour into a mug. Add a teaspoon of honey. Add hot water. You may find hot drinks relaxing, particularly before sleeping.

If after trying these suggestions, your cough is still difficult to cope with, do seek advice from your doctor or nurse.

Medicines for coughs

Several medications can be prescribed for your cough.

Below is a list of medications which may help:

Simple Linctus

Cough syrup is taken orally in liquid form. It can be used several times a day to improve your cough.

Painkillers

Several painkillers can also be used to control cough.

These can be injected or taken in tablet or liquid form. One example would be a morphine- type medication such as codeine linctus, pholcodine, morphine or methadone.

Steroids

These can reduce inflammation of the lung airways.

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Anti indigestion drugs (proton pump inhibitors)

These medications can ease coughing by reducing indigestion. It is thought that sometimes coughing may be due to indigestion. The medications can be taken orally.

Bronchodilator drugs

These drugs help open up the airways and ease cough. They can be given via inhalers or nebulisers. Nebulisers deliver a liquid drug as a fine mist through a specialised mask for you to breathe in.

Sterile salt water nebuliser (saline)

Saline can be given via a nebuliser.

Carbocysteine

This can be taken as a tablet to loosen thick phlegm to make it easier to cough up.

If you would like more information on medicines for cough, speak to your doctor or nurse.

These medicines are only available on prescription and may not be suitable for everyone.

Complementary therapies

Complementary therapies such as reflexology, acupressure, acupuncture and aromatherapy can be helpful.

However, little research has been conducted in this area and it is important to

talk to a healthcare professional if you are thinking of trying any.

Your feelings

If you are finding it difficult to cope with your cough or if you feel anxious or low in mood, counselling may help you. Many people find that talking openly about how they feel with a trained counsellor can improve their ability to manage day to day. There are many different counselling services available to cancer patients.

Counselling services vary in availability between different areas. You can ask your hospital doctor, nurse or GP to tell you which services are

available to you.

They can also make a referral for you to a specific counselling service.

Caring for someone with a cough and mesothelioma

If you are looking after someone with a cough, it may be helpful to encourage them to try the strategies included in this booklet. Coughing can be extremely tiring and distressing. Sometimes even the simple daily tasks such as washing and dressing can be difficult. It may be possible for you to help them with these tasks.

It can be very difficult for people to socialise when

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they have a severe cough. Some people find it embarrassing to cough in public, particularly if in restaurants or theatres. People often worry that their cough disturbs others. If this is the case, plan activities with them that might lessen these anxieties and embarrassment such as eating nice meals at home or sharing time with them in an outside environment such as a park or the countryside.

Encourage them to discuss their symptoms with their doctor or nurse. They may want you to attend the appointment with them so that you can understand more about what causes their cough and how best

to support them to ease their cough. Caring for someone with a cough and mesothelioma is not always easy. If you share a room with them, their cough can disturb your sleep and can be a constant reminder of their illness.

This can add to the stress and anxiety of caring. It is important that you also look after yourself. You may need to ask help from others in order to avoid becoming extremely tired. This is not always easy if you don't want to let your relative or friend down, but it is important to avoid becoming exhausted to care for them as well as you can.

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provides specialist, impartial, up to date support and information.



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Reviewed: September 2021 | Review due: September 2023 | MED-12-02

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