

## Chronic cough including whooping cough

### RFQs

- How has your weight been?
- What colour is your phlegm? Any blood?
- How is your breathing? How is it affecting you? Is there any pain in your chest?
- What about fever or sweats?
- Do you smoke?
- Do you have asthma or a family history of asthma?
- Has any one else had this type of cough?
- Do you get heartburn or any nasal symptoms?

Crikey, that's a fairly drastic cough. I wonder if you might have whooping cough?

### Provide

Whooping cough typically causes a cough that can make you retch. It causes bouts of a dry cough but you will often feel fine in between coughing bouts. It is infectious for the first 3 weeks, are you in contact with anyone with poor immunity or ill health?

(Let's consider giving you some antibiotics to protect others from catching whooping cough.) Unfortunately antibiotics are unlikely to help *your* cough unless we use them in the first week of your illness (and may cause you harm).

There is a 50% chance that this is whooping cough. If it is, your cough should start to improve after 6 weeks, but some cough symptoms may go for 3 months. The Chinese call it the 100 day cough for good reason.

Of course, there is a 50% chance that this is not whooping cough. Please let me know if you are coughing up blood or losing weight.

Could your cough be linked to asthma? Do you wheeze or feel breathless when you have the cough? Is there asthma in your family? Is it worth checking your peak flow in the mornings compared to your day time peak flow? What about we try you on a course of steroid tablets (or an inhaler)?

Do you get much in the way of nasal symptoms? If you are getting post nasal debris or a post nasal drip it may be worth using a saline flush, and / or a nasal steroid to settle your symptoms down. Nasal symptoms may even be triggered by silent heartburn (or not so silent heartburn).

What about heartburn? A lot of people have a cough at night caused by food coming up. I would recommend that we try to control your symptoms by propping up your bed. Lift the head end of the bed by 8 inches (15cm). On bricks or a plank. You might also like our help to lose a little weight. This leaflet tells you the main things to avoid to minimise problems with heartburn. Smoking, or eating chocolate and mints can make things worse for example.

Perhaps we should stop your lisinopril. Lisinopril commonly causes a dry cough. If your blood pressure goes up again we can put you on a different blood pressure tablet that won't cause a cough. The cough may take a couple of months or so to improve after stopping the lisinopril.

For God's sake Tony, isn't it time that you stopped smoking? (Only if you know the patient well.)

Your chest X-ray is fine for now, but that is not an absolute guarantee that you don't have lung cancer. We should see you urgently if you are coughing up blood, or losing weight (and

even shoulder tip pain). But the smoking really needs to stop. When might be a good time to do that? What about vaping?

Your platelet numbers are high. We probably ought to repeat that test in a month or so. Let me ask you a few questions to make sure that you have no symptoms that might suggest cancer. A persistently high platelet number can sometimes (one in five) suggest cancer.

(I know you think that there is no point in stopping smoking because you already have lung cancer. But you are wrong! There is plenty of evidence that stopping smoking, at this point, will improve your quality of life, and your life expectancy. How's about it?)

Safety net:

Since your cough is so typical of whooping cough, and your chest is clear we probably don't need to do a chest X-ray just yet.

Of course, there is a 50% chance that this is not whooping cough. Please let me know if you are coughing up blood, losing weight, or becoming breathless.

Because you used to smoke, we should probably do a Chest X-ray at this time. What do you think?