

How To Clear Your Secretions



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Developed by Allina Health.

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For specific information about your health condition, please contact your health care provider.





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How To Clear Secretions

Secretions

Mucus and phlegm are known as **secretions**. Getting rid of the secretions will help keep you from getting an infection and it will make you feel better.

- **Mucus** is a slippery, watery substance that lines some organs and other parts of your body such as the lungs and nose.
- **Phlegm** (flem) is mucus that becomes thick and sticky. If you have a lung disease, the phlegm builds up in your lungs and blocks your airways. The buildup of phlegm makes it easy for bacteria to grow. This leads to repeated, serious lung infections.

When to call your primary care provider

Check your secretions. Call your primary care provider if:

- the color changes from clear or tan to dark yellow, brown or green
- you have a fever of 100.8 F or higher.

Cough

Tip

Make an effort to cough. It helps clear mucus and other substances from your airways.

A cough occurs when the nerve endings in your airways become irritated. It's your body's way of clearing your airways of mucus, phlegm or an irritant like smoke or pollen. This helps prevent infection. A cough can also be a sign of a medical problem.

There are 3 types of cough:

- cough that lasts less than 3 weeks (acute). It is caused by a cold, pneumonia or the flu.
- cough that lasts 3 to 8 weeks (subacute). It remains after a cold or other infection.
- cough that lasts more than 8 weeks (chronic). It is caused by conditions such as asthma, reflux disease and sinus infections.

When your cough lasts awhile, it can cause problems: chest pain, feeling tired, lack of sleep and missing work or school.

Some medicines can also cause coughing. Talk with your primary care provider if you have a new cough, a cough that is getting worse, or if you cough up blood.

Postural Drainage (Chest Physical Therapy)

Another way to help get mucus out of your lungs is called postural drainage. This is also known as chest physical therapy or chest clapping.

A respiratory therapist can do this treatment. He or she can train a member of your care circle (family member, friend or someone close to you).

For this treatment, you will:

- sit with your head tilted down
- lie on your stomach with your head down.

The therapist claps your chest and back with cupped hands or uses a device such as:

- inflatable therapy vest
- hand-held device that causes vibrations while you breathe through it
- mask that create vibrations.

Together, gravity and force help break up loose mucus from your lungs.

This treatment can be uncomfortable. Your respiratory therapist will show you and a member of your care circle how to do this correctly.

The best time for this treatment is in the morning before you eat.

Your respiratory therapist claps your chest and back with cupped hands or uses a device such as inflatable therapy vest and a hand-held device. Gravity and force help break up mucus from your lungs.



Positive Expiratory Pressure

A hand-held device can help loosen the mucus from your lungs by keeping your airways open so you can cough out the mucus.

One example is a mucociliary clearance device. It sends vibrations to your lungs as you breathe out (exhale) through the device. You set the resistance to create positive pressure inside your airways.



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Your respiratory therapist or primary care provider will show you how to use a hand-held device to help loosen mucus from your lungs.

Coughing To Help You Save Energy

There are ways to cough that will help clear mucus and help you save energy. You can use these techniques any time, especially if you are feeling weak or if you are having trouble clearing your lungs.

These techniques are different from coughing and hacking or coughing with pursed-lip breathing. Your respiratory therapist will show you how to do a huff cough, a controlled cough or both. Ask him or her if you have questions or concerns.

Huff cough

1. Sit up straight in a chair or in bed.
2. Take a deep breath through your nose.
3. Hold your breath for up to 3 seconds.
4. Open your mouth.
5. Breathe out (exhale) hard and quickly through your mouth 2 or 3 times. Make a “ha” sound as you exhale.
6. Repeat as often as you need.

Controlled cough

1. Sit up straight in a chair. Keep your feet flat on the floor.
2. Take a deep breath through your nose.
3. Hold your breath for up to 2 seconds.
4. Fold your arms over your abdomen (belly) as you lean forward a little.
5. Breathe out (exhale) hard and quickly through your mouth 2 or 3 times.
6. Return to your starting position.
7. Repeat as often as you need.

To Do List



- Practice breathing exercises that are comfortable each day.
- Practice the mucus-clearing techniques every day when you have extra phlegm or mucus you cannot cough up.
- Talk with your primary care provider if a hand-held device for getting rid of mucus is right for you.
- Follow your directions for taking medicine.
- Consider gentle workouts like qigong, yoga or tai chi. (They will help strengthen the muscles that help you breathe.)
- If you are able, attend a class through community education or at a fitness center, or check your local library for DVDs.
- Ask your primary care provider about pulmonary rehabilitation.
- Talk with your primary care provider about any other health concerns you have.
- Keep all follow-up appointments.

Questions and Notes

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