



## **Symptom Management: Cough**

Coughing can be a distressing symptom and can be persistent, dry or productive. Breathlessness can trigger a cough, and vice versa. Persistent coughing can often cause vomiting, exhaustion, chest or abdominal pain and insomnia.

### **Causes**

Coughing is a normal mechanism that protects the airways and lungs and is under both voluntary and involuntary control.

Coughing can be caused by inflammation, irritation or excessive secretions. It can be caused by the lung cancer irritating the airways, or secreting fluids; however there are other causes such as chest infection.

### **Management**

- It is important you discuss any cough symptoms with your doctor or nurse, to enable a full assessment of the cough and the effect it has on you.
- Management will be determined by the nature of the cough, as well as the patient's general condition.

### **Strategies that help a productive cough**

- Drink plenty of fluids as this will help to thin the secretions; water, juices or canned drinks are preferable. Caffeine based tea, coffee and cola are less helpful as they make you pass more urine
- Ensure you are in a comfortable sitting position, e.g. relaxed sitting, relaxed standing, forward leaning or lying on your side with your good side uppermost
- A physiotherapist can advise you on certain types of breathing techniques that may be helpful.

Source: National Lung Cancer Forum For Nurses

- Some patients find benefit using: steam inhalation, nebulised saline, cough mixtures for productive coughs, physiotherapy to the chest and or medication to reduce the stickiness of the sputum

### **Strategies that help a dry cough**

- Try to increase your oral intake of fluid, preferably with water
- Suck on sweets or lozenges
- Drink warm honey and water
- Try ice cold drinks or suck on ice pops
- Try breathing in steam from hot water; you could also try some herbal drops in the water
- Try cough linctus or a cough suppressant; these can be prescribed by your doctor or nurse
- Morphine is also used to suppress a cough; your nurse or doctor can advise on this
- For a night time cough avoid lying on your back