

SILICOSIS

Dry Cough: Information and Tips



A persistent dry cough is a common symptom in Silicosis that can vary in severity and can be caused by irritation of bronchial and tracheal nerves by silicotic nodules. (RACGP) The following is information on a dry cough associated with Silicosis and strategies that may help ease a dry cough.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

A persistent cough can be particularly difficult to deal with when diagnosed with Silicosis. It can make daily tasks harder to manage such as showering and dressing. Often coughing can cause significant tiredness from the effort it takes to cough as well as interrupted sleep. Breathlessness is often worse when coughing which can be very frightening. Coughing can also lead to dry retching and vomiting; it can also cause dizziness and also affect bladder control where small amount of urine can leak whilst coughing.

EMOTIONAL EFFECTS

Having a persistent dry cough can cause significant distress. It can make you more anxious and worry whether your condition may be worsening. It can also be embarrassing if you are in a public place and can cause anger and irritability which is particularly common. It is important that you speak with your GP or medical specialist who can help with managing these symptoms.

AVOIDING COUGHING TRIGGERS

Coughing can be caused by number of triggers which vary from person to person. These may include steam, smoke, cold air, strong perfumes and aerosols. Pay attention to what triggers your cough and try to avoid these situations. Some techniques to try are, wear a scarf over your mouth if going outside on a cold day, use alternative preparations such as roll on deodorants instead of aerosol, use scent free soap and washing powders and avoid smoky environments.

CONTROLLING COUGHING AND THROAT CLEARING

Repeated coughing and throat clearing can cause irritation and inflammation of the airways. Trying techniques that help to suppress the cough can sometimes help to reduce these symptoms. Take a few days to monitor how often you cough or clear your throat and how you are feeling 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, or
2. Sniff then swallow, or
3. Swallow.

It may take a few attempts at the controlling technique to work out which technique works for you, but the key is to persevere.

Another technique to try to stop the cough reflex:

1. Cough twice with your mouth open (you can still cover your mouth with a tissue or cough into your elbow), then swallow, then gentle slow breathing and try to distract your focus away by counting the links in your watch or linking your fingers together and then unlinking them.

COUGH REMEDIES

Below are some cough remedies that may bring some relief:

1. Menthol Drops or other cough drops,
2. Honey and lemon drink - squeeze the juice of half a lemon and pour into a cup, add a teaspoon of honey and add hot water. You may find hot drinks relaxing particularly before bed.
3. Drinking herbal teas that may help with cough suppression such as ginger root, slippery elm bark, marshmallow root, thyme leaves and peppermint leaves.
4. Using a humidifier at home.
5. Gargling warm water mixed with half a teaspoon of cooking salt.

There are medicines that can be prescribed for your cough such as simple linctus, painkillers, steroids, proton pump inhibitors and bronchodilator drugs. These medicines are not suitable for everyone so you will need to consult your GP or medical specialist to discuss these medicines.

There are several complementary therapies available that might help to manage symptoms. These include reflexology, acupuncture and aromatherapy. These therapies have yet to been shown in clinical trials to improve coughing, however research in this field is ongoing. Despite this, some find them relaxing and helpful.

Sleeping at night can be difficult because of coughing. Sometimes the cough is worse in certain positions such as lying on a particular side or lying flat in bed. Try sleeping in different positions including propping up with pillows.

IN CONCLUSION

It can be very difficult to cope with an ongoing dry cough. It can make you feel anxious and low in mood and it can also be a constant reminder of your diagnosis. If you are finding it difficult, you may benefit from counselling. You can talk your GP about what services are available, or you can reach out to the Silicosis Support Network where individual and group counselling is available.

