






# Cough

'Coughs and colds' are the archetypal conditions seen in general practice - indeed cough is the most common symptomatic presentation to Australian GPs. Cough usually has a benign aetiology, but can be the first symptom of serious disease. GP registrars need to develop a systematic approach to the assessment and management of cough, including appropriate investigation where indicated.

<p><b>TEACHING AND LEARNING AREAS</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common and serious causes of cough in general practice (acute and chronic)</li> <li>• Red flags for potentially serious disease, and indications for investigation</li> <li>• Evidence-based symptomatic treatment of RTI-related cough</li> <li>• Approach to cough in children and the elderly</li> </ul>
<p><b>PRE- SESSION ACTIVITIES</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read the excellent MJA clinical overview CICADA: <a href="#">Cough in Children and Adults</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>TEACHING TIPS AND TRAPS</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-viral cough can persist for many weeks after an acute URTI</li> <li>• Don't order chest x-rays in patients with simple uncomplicated acute bronchitis – see RACGP <a href="#">Choosing Wisely</a></li> <li>• Common pitfalls in diagnosing cough – asthma, GORD, pertussis, CCF, ACE inhibitor cough, occupational causes, lung cancer, TB, foreign body</li> <li>• Green sputum does not predict bacterial infection</li> <li>• Avoid prescribing antibiotics for URTI and acute bronchitis – see <a href="#">Choosing Wisely</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>RESOURCES</b></p> 	<p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CFP - <a href="#">Acute Cough in Adults</a></li> <li>• CFP - <a href="#">Acute Cough in Children</a></li> <li>• AAFP - <a href="#">Algorithm for assessment of chronic cough</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>FOLLOW UP/ EXTENSION ACTIVITIES</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the registrar to complete the Clinical Reasoning Challenge under exam conditions and discuss</li> <li>• Registrar to record the details of the next 10 patients that present with a cough and discuss key features on history and examination</li> </ul>

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## Clinical Reasoning Challenge

Bobbie Ling, aged 61, presents to you with a 5 week history of cough. He is a new patient to the practice. He describes a typical viral URTI at the start of the illness (runny nose and sore throat), and the cough has persisted since then. He denies past respiratory problems.

QUESTION 1. What are the MOST IMPORTANT key features of history in helping to identify potentially serious causes of this patient's cough? List up to SIX.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION 2. What are the MOST IMPORTANT causes (both common and serious) of this patient's cough to consider? List up to FIVE.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION 3. What are the MOST IMPORTANT initial investigations to help diagnoses the cause of this cough? List up to FOUR.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_

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## ANSWERS

### QUESTION 1.

What are the MOST IMPORTANT key features of history in helping to identify serious causes of this patient's cough? List up to SIX.

- Haemoptysis
- Smoking history
- SOB
- Chest pain
- Weight loss
- Fever
- TB exposure (migrant, health care worker)

### QUESTION 2.

What are the MOST IMPORTANT causes (common and serious) of this patient's cough to consider? List up to FIVE.

- Post viral cough/post-nasal drip
- Asthma
- GORD
- Cancer of the lung
- CCF
- TB

### QUESTION 3.

What are the MOST IMPORTANT initial investigations to help diagnoses the cause of this cough? List up to FOUR.

- CXR
- Spirometry
- Sputum culture (including AFB)
- FBC
- ESR