WHY DO I COUGH

22 January, 2016

A cough can be so incessant and recurring that it is terrible for both the patient and those close to them at home, socially and at work. If can disturb sleep and be very distressing. If very severe it can cause vomiting and incontinence.

Cough means different things to different people – it can be a constant clearing of the throat or can be a hacking productive cough originating from deep down in the chest. There are over 35 causes of cough and the role of your chest physician is to work this out for you and then recommend treatment. It is important to appreciate that you may have more than one cause of cough operating at any one time and so treatment of only one cause when there are several may lead to the mistaken belief that the treatments to date have failed when this is not true.

Some of questions you may be asked are:

- Can you localise where the irritation to cough originates
- Is it productive or dry
- Is it worse on lying down or on first standing up in the morning
- Does it wake you from sleep
- Is your voice changing as well
- Do you get reflux and does reflux make you cough
- Have you coughed any blood
- Does cold air or exertion make you cough
- Do puffers make any difference to your cough

Some of the common causes of cough are:

Asthma, Reflux, Post nasal drainage, bronchiectasis, chronic bronchitis, vocal cord dysfunction, lung scarring diseases, medications and cancers.

Treatment

This will clearly depend upon the cause. However it may require further investigations such as bronchoscopy or allergy testing and/or referral to a speech therapist. If finding a cause fails or treatment is not effective then there may be a need to use treatments that treat the cough rather than the cause.