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Mystery cough? 8 possible culprits

updated 11:40 a.m. EDT, Mon June 22, 2009

By Ray Hainer

Health

([Health.com](#)) -- You've been coughing for weeks. How do you know if it's just a hard-to-shake cold or something more serious?



Coughing is one of the five most common reasons for a doctor's visit.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Inhaling pollen, dust, pet dander can trigger a
- Short-term fume exposure can result in cough
- How to tell acute bronchitis from a more serio
- Only a doctor can tell for sure what's behind e

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A chronic cough, defined as lasting more than eight weeks, is not uncommon.

Up to 40 percent of nonsmokers in the United States and Europe have reported a chronic cough at some point, and coughing is one of the five most common reasons for a doctor's visit.

Only a doctor can tell for sure what's behind your endless hacking.

However, in a 2006 study of women with an average age of 48 who had a cough lasting for six months, 39 percent were found to have asthma, 9 percent had chronic upper airway cough syndrome (commonly known as postnasal drip), and 9 percent had gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

In addition, another 11 percent had chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a serious,

progressive disease that includes both emphysema and bronchitis. While not all people who develop COPD



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