

STOP THAT COUGH!

HEALTH ROUND-UP

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Remember when they used to ask you whether it was dry, chesty or tickly? Now there's a one-stop solution...

Did you know a single cough can expel 3000 droplets of mucus at speeds of up to 50mph? Yuk! No wonder they are such a good way of spreading infection.

But don't expect much sympathy from your doctor if you turn up with one. Even though you feel rotten and your sleep has been disturbed, there isn't much he or she can do except suggest a visit to the pharmacist.

Eight out of 10 of us get at least one cough a year, nearly always during or just after a cold. Coughing is a natural way of clearing our throats, but when it goes on and on it gets us down. Going out into the cold weather — or coming into a warm room — talking on the phone, laughing and eating cake can all set off spasms of uncontrollable coughing.

The pharmacist will probably quiz you about your symptoms before selecting a treatment.

Is the cough dry, tickly or chesty? Pharmacist Angela Chalmers admits many of us are baffled by the question. Coughs can be dry, tickly and chesty at the same time.

In fact there's no need to rack our brains. There's only ONE type of common cough,

says Professor Alyn Morice of Hull University. He explains: 'The body's natural cough reflex is hijacked by the cold virus, becoming hypersensitive and causing an uncontrollable urge to cough. We now know that, although coughs may produce different symptoms, they are all driven by this hypersensitivity.'

This discovery has led to the launch of the first pharmacy-only cough medicine in 30 years, Unicough, which claims to ease all common coughs. It is a thick, cocoa-flavoured medicine, and its most important ingredient is diphenhydramine, which targets the hypersensitive cough reflex. Research in the UK, which compared it with cough linctus, showed that the new medicine eased coughs more quickly.

Diphenhydramine is found in some other cough mixtures, so it is worth checking



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what you've got at home.

So why were we ever asked what kind of cough we had? The question goes back to the days when many chesty coughs were caused by serious diseases such as tuberculosis, which required specific treatments.

Coughs which follow colds are nearly always harmless, says Professor Morice. However, a cough that doesn't go away can be a symptom of a more serious condition such as lung cancer, heart failure, a blood clot on the lung or tuberculosis.

See your GP if:

- You've had your cough for more than three weeks and it isn't getting better.
- You are coughing up blood.
- You are short of breath, having breathing difficulties or chest pain (get urgent help if this is severe).
- You have other symptoms such as unexplained weight loss, a persistent change in your voice, or lumps or swellings in your neck.

**Take
a Break**