

COUGHING

Coughing is a vital body defense mechanism that ejects everything from germs to foreign objects from the lungs and windpipe. When you're unable to cough, which may happen, for instance, following surgery or a chest injury, pneumonia can become a serious threat. So don't feel put upon when you have an occasional coughing spell; it's probably doing you more good than harm.

Sometimes though, coughing is clearly unproductive. Nothing except air is being expelled, your throat becomes raw, and it may be difficult to speak or even to sleep. Assuming you have had a medical evaluation of your condition, there is a wide range of natural cough remedies available.

One scholarly text we consulted lists no fewer than 37 different herbs used in pharmaceutical preparations or in folk medicine to treat coughing. Many, however, are difficult to obtain, while others are potentially dangerous, so here we shall limit ourselves to a practical selection of safe cough remedies. The first two are variations on a classic theme.

"Every winter my son gets a terrible cough, which makes it difficult for him to sleep. I tried over-the-counter cough syrups and even prescription medicine from his pediatrician. One evening last winter he was coughing so bad I knew I had to do something before the continuous coughing made him sick. "I gave him one tablespoon of honey with a couple drops of pure lemon juice. To my amazement the cough ceased and he slept through the night without coughing again." - M.E.B., Kansas

"For constant nagging coughs, I take two large Spanish onions and slice them thinly. I pour about two cups of honey over them, cover, and let stand overnight. The next day, I strain off the syrup and add a jigger of brandy. We take one teaspoon of the syrup every three hours, keeping it bottled and refrigerated between uses." -L.L.G., New Jersey.

Whether you use lemon juice or onions or even horseradish, the idea is to combine a "hot" herb with something soothing like honey. There is no need to prepare these remedies in the amounts given, nor even in the exact proportions. And certainly, you don't need that little bit of brandy in the second one.

Traditionally, many people use honey and lemon in tea, not only for coughs, but for sore throat and colds. If you are going to make tea, you might want to try one made from one or more of the following herbs: American chestnut leaves, angelica, balm of Gilead buds, fenugreek seeds, garlic, horehound, licorice root, marshmallow root, red clover tops, white pine bark or wild cherry bark. When using either of the two tree barks mentioned (both of which are traditional remedies), use the inner bark, boiling a slight handful of bark scrapings in about a cup of water for approximately 20 minutes. Besides adding honey and lemon to our tea, you might also want to put in some slivers of dried orange peel, chewing them up when the tea is consumed.

Coughing might also be relieved with a cup of tea made from burdock, hyssop, marjoram (the sweet king, not pot marjoram), myrrh, oregano, parsley or yerba santa. This next anecdote concerns the last-named herb:

"Our family has used yerba santa - called the holy herb by the Spanish Fathers-for years. I've often given leaves to friends who were fighting a cough. Sometimes it was taken in doubt but the person later reported with amazement that after a swallow or two of the tea at bedtime, a quiet night of sleep had followed. I make the tea when needed by putting a good full teaspoon of dry leaves, or several fresh ones, or small sprigs, in a heavy mug. I pour on boiling water, cover and let it steep for 20-30 minutes. It may be used hot or cold." -LT., Arizona.

"From November 1970 until June 1971, I suffered with bronchitis. I was employed as a hairdresser, but spent most of my time coughing. I was going to doctors regularly, but with no success. A friend of mine told me to drink fenugreek seed tea. She recommended one cup each hour on the hour the first day to saturate the system. Then four cups a day thereafter. Within a week, my seven-month-long illness was gone. My friend said that fenugreek tea flushes the mucus out of the body. It certainly did something. I have come down with bronchitis several times in the ten years since then. Each time I use the fenugreek tea, and each time, I get better." -J.M.H., Florida

To brew fenugreek seed tea, put about one heaping tablespoon of the seeds into some vigorously boiling water, and then let the seeds steep, stirring occasionally, until the water turns yellow and aromatic.