Approach to Cough in Adults

Acute
< 3 Weeks

- Abn. Vitals, Toxic or Air Hungry
  - Yes → CXR, O2 Sat., Spirometry
  - No → Sputum?

  - Sputum?
    - Yes → Investigate, Stop Exposure, Treat Symptoms
    - No → Supportive OTC of Choice

  - No → Upper Resp. Sx “A Cold”
    - 1st Generation Antihistamine +/- Decongestant

  - Sputum?
    - Yes → Lower Resp. Sx “Bronchitis”
      - Bronchodilator
      - Inh. Steroids
      - Oral Steroids
      - No Antibiotics

Secondary Causes

Occupational Environmental

Asthma “Cough Variant”

UACS
Upper Airway Cough Syn.

1st Generation Antihistamine +/- Decongestant

Antibiotics or Other Disease Specific Tx

Adapted from Chest 2006; 129:1S-23S
Richard Rathe, MD (Aug 2010)
Approach to Cough in Adults

Sub-Acute
3-8 Weeks

Secondary Causes

Post Infectious

No

Post Infectious Cough

Anticholinergic
Inh. Steroids
Oral Steroids

CXR
Consistent With COPD

Known Stable COPD

Stop Smoking
Stop ACEI

Chronic
> 8 Weeks

No

Sputum?

Yes

Lower Resp. Sx
"Bronchitis"

Supportive
OTC of Choice
Antibiotics ??

Secondary Causes

Occupational
Environmental

Asthma
"Cough Variant"

GERD
> 3 Weeks
Not Acute

GERD
> 3 Weeks
Not Acute

Anticholinergic
Inh. Steroids
Oral Steroids

AECB
Ac. Exacerbation
Ch. Bronchitis

Antibiotics
Bronchodilator
Anticholinergic
Oral Steroids

Sinus Imaging
> 8 Weeks Only
Tx as Indicated

Further Investigation or Referral

Investigate
Stop Exposure
Treat Symptoms

Bronchodilator
Inh. Steroids
Oral Steroids

PPI or H2 Blocker
Lifestyle Changes

1st Generation
Antihistamine
+/- Decongestant

Antibiotics
Bronchodilator
Anticholinergic
Oral Steroids

Bronchodilator
Anticholinergic
Theophylline?
Inh. Steroids?
No Antibiotics

No

Abn. Vitals,
Toxic or
Air Hungry?

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