

COUGH - BEHAVIOR, SYMPTOM, DISEASE

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Cough is the most important defensive reflex of airways. It cleans airways from potentially harmful particles and agents. Cough begins with deep preparatory inspiration providing sufficient lung volume for subsequent forceful expulsion. Cough expulsions, produced by high expiratory muscle activity and large intrathoracic pressures, result in fast airflows and air accelerations, which clear the airways.

Cough is well organized, precisely controlled and executed, and smoothly coordinated with other behaviors, such as breathing, swallowing, talking etc.

The control of cough, including its initiation, is done by afferent pathway with cough sensory receptors, complex central circuits generating cough motor pattern and cough motor output (including effector muscles) and coordinating its execution in relation with occurrence of other behaviors.

Cough is a symptom of several diseases such as asthma, gastro-esophageal reflux, pulmonary and airway infections etc.

Coughing is affected by emotional state, is voluntarily modifiable, and can occur due to psychological reasons (psychogenic cough). Under these conditions and in form of idiopathic, mostly chronic cough, it can be considered as a disease.

The treatment and management of cough, due to its variability and physiological function, poses a real challenge in medical practice.

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