



Let's Talk About Chronic Cough: A Perspective from Patient Advocacy Partners

Approximately 5% of adults in the United States live with chronic cough, a cough lasting longer than 8 weeks. People with the condition commonly cough in “bouts” they cannot control, and usually feel a strong urge to cough or a tickle in their throat before a coughing bout starts.

Leaders from *The Cough Chronicles*' group of patient advocacy partners, including Bev Stewart, National Senior Director of Lung Diseases at the American Lung Association (Lung Association), Kathy Przywara, Vice President of Community at the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), and Lynda Mitchell, Chief Executive Officer at the Allergy & Asthma Network (AAN), share their perspectives and shed light on the impact chronic cough may have on the daily lives of people living with the condition.

Q: What challenges do people living with chronic cough experience? What can be done to help reduce those challenges?

- **Bev Stewart, Lung Association:** I have met people who have been living with chronic cough for 10, 20 and 30 years, and they tell me about the ways it affects their health — from dizziness and headaches, to physical exhaustion and sleep disturbances. Understandably, this can take a toll on a person's emotional and physical well-being.

A common theme I have heard from people is how disruptive this condition can be because they never know when they are going to start coughing. Will a coughing bout start while watching a movie at the theater or in the middle of a fancy dinner? How do they handle it — do they stay where they are or excuse themselves? Do they avoid activities where persistent coughing may bother others? People living with chronic cough tell me they have to answer these questions all the time. I see how this can be frustrating and isolating. People tell me they want someone to listen and acknowledge what they are going through.

- **Kathy Przywara, AAFA:** Through conversations with people, I understand that chronic cough can be irritating, frustrating and at times embarrassing. Getting a timely diagnosis is one of the biggest challenges I've seen, as there are many possible underlying causes of chronic cough that need to be investigated and the process may involve seeing multiple specialists. I think it's important for people with chronic cough to receive a diagnosis so they can start to understand the condition and ways to address it.

Q: What do those living with chronic cough tell you about how the condition affects their relationships or impacts family members?

- **Bev Stewart, Lung Association:** Many people with chronic cough tell me that the condition has progressively affected their relationship with various family members. For example, one woman explained that her husband doesn't sleep in the same room as her anymore because her coughing is too disruptive and wakes him up at night.
- **Lynda Mitchell, AAN:** People living with chronic cough have told me that they sometimes feel isolated. It can be difficult for them to speak or take part in get-togethers with family and friends because of uncontrollable coughing bouts — or the fear of experiencing one. People with chronic cough may avoid social situations or conversations, which can negatively impact day-to-day quality of life.

Q: What are the best ways family/friends of those living with chronic cough can help and offer support to their loved ones?

- **Kathy Przywara, AAFA:** I think one of the best things family and friends can do is show patience and be understanding. Chronic cough can be exhausting for the person living with the condition because they can't just "stop" coughing. It's important for family and friends to provide a listening ear for support. For those living with chronic cough, voicing their frustrations in a supportive environment may be helpful.
- **Lynda Mitchell, AAN:** I've heard that living with chronic cough can be frustrating and the journey to diagnosis may take time. One of the best ways to support someone with chronic cough is to encourage them to advocate for themselves. It can be difficult to explain to a doctor how often or bad the cough is and how it may be affecting daily life.

As a loved one, you have a special role. Another set of ears can be very helpful. Ask if they would like you to attend doctor visits with them and take notes. It's also important to just listen and let them know you're present and engaged.

Q: Why do you think it's important to collaborate with Merck on *The Cough Chronicles*? What do you hope people take away from it?

- **Bev Stewart, Lung Association:** The great thing about *The Cough Chronicles* is that it helps people understand that they are not alone. I have seen first-hand how people find relief in knowing that there are others out there with shared experiences.
- **Kathy Przywara, AAFA:** It is important for people with chronic cough to know that there are resources out there that can help them better understand the condition, which is why we're excited to continue to collaborate with Merck on *The Cough Chronicles*.
- **Lynda Mitchell, AAN:** We partner with Merck to raise awareness of chronic cough and support those living with the condition. Together, we provide people with chronic cough and their families with resources so they can better understand and navigate chronic cough.



Bev Stewart is the National Senior Director of Lung Diseases at the American Lung Association and oversees the organization's nationwide lung disease programs, supporting those with chronic cough through various initiatives.



Kathy Przywara is the Vice President of Community at the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America and leads community programming to help reduce the burden of disease and support those with chronic cough through advocacy, education and research.



Lynda Mitchell, MA, CAE is the CEO of the Allergy & Asthma Network. She leads the strategic direction of the organization, builds partnerships with stakeholder groups and aligns health equity work in all mission areas.

