

# HICCUP

(Hiccough, Singultus)



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Hiccups are a symptom, not a disease. Hiccups involve the diaphragm (the large, thin muscle that separates the chest from the abdomen) and the phrenic nerve (the nerve that connects the diaphragm to the brain). Almost everybody gets hiccups, even unborn babies.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

A sharp, quick sound produced from the mouth by a spasm of the diaphragm. The spasm closes muscles in the back of the throat.

### CAUSES

Irritation of nerves that control breathing muscles, especially the diaphragm. The cause of short hiccup episodes is usually unknown. Prolonged or recurrent hiccup episodes may be caused by many different medical problems.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Swallowing hot or irritating substances.
- Diseases of the pleura (thin membrane layers that cover the lung).
- Pneumonia.
- Uremia (a blood infection).
- Alcoholism.
- Disorders of the stomach, esophagus, bowel, or pancreas.
- Pregnancy.
- Bladder irritation.
- Hepatitis of the liver.
- Spread of cancer from another part of the body to the liver or part of the pleura.
- Recent surgery, especially abdominal surgery.
- Emotional causes.
- Use of drugs, such as those that irritate the stomach.
- Full stomach.
- Laughter or intense emotions.
- Changes in temperature.
- Alcohol use.
- Noxious fumes (bad smells in the air).

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Cannot be prevented at present.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Short hiccup episodes usually don't indicate disease. They will go away on their own or with treatment. Continued hiccups can be a problem and require medical care to find and treat the cause.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

None, unless hiccups are prolonged, which may indicate a medical problem.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

• These instructions are for short hiccup episodes. Prolonged hiccups require medical care. Try one or more methods to see which works best for you.

- Hold your breath and count to 10.
  - Breathe into a paper bag, and rebreath air in the bag. Don't use a plastic bag because it may cling to nostrils.
  - Insert your thumb between your teeth and upper lip; press the upper lip with your index finger just below the right nostril.
  - Press a forefinger into each ear for about 20 seconds.
  - Drink a glass of water rapidly.
  - Swallow dry bread or crushed ice.
  - Pull gently on the tongue.
  - Close eyelids and apply gentle pressure to the eyeballs.
  - Swallow a teaspoon of dry sugar.
- See your health care provider if hiccups continue or recur often. A physical exam will be done and questions asked about your symptoms and activities. Medical tests are usually not needed, but may be done to check for a suspected medical problem.
- In rare cases, drugs or nerve surgery may be needed for severe, persistent hiccups.

### MEDICATIONS

Usually no drugs are needed for this disorder. In some severe or prolonged cases, drugs may be prescribed to help control the hiccups.

### ACTIVITY

No limits.

### DIET

Avoid overeating or drinking carbonated drinks.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- Hiccups persist longer than 8 hours.
- You suspect a prescription drug may be the cause of hiccups.

Special notes:

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More notes on the back of this page