

Instructions for Use of Capsaicin for Sensory Neuropathic Cough

Background:

At Bastian Voice Institute, we have been using capsaicin in some of our patients with SNC for many years. It appears that, for some people, capsaicin can relieve the symptoms of SNC in one of two ways.

1. It may deplete a neurotransmitter called Substance P that is found in the mucosa (lining of the throat). Incidentally, this may explain why individuals who eat a lot of hot food develop a tolerance to it. The idea is that the regular use of capsaicin would, over time, not only deplete Substance P but at the same time decrease the frequency or severity of a person's cough. To try to attain this benefit, capsaicin should be used on a regular schedule, as described below. A minimum 2-week trial would be necessary to determine if someone can attain this benefit.
2. It may also or instead work as a counter-irritant. Think of it as a super strong cough drop. In this case, the use of capsaicin immediately before the onset of a particular coughing attack might abort or shorten that attack. To try to attain this benefit, capsaicin would need to be kept nearby so that a person could readily use it whenever he or she feels that a coughing attack is about to begin.

How to use:

1. Stand in front of your bathroom mirror, open your mouth widely, and try to look as far back into your mouth as possible.
2. Depress your tongue as much as possible (by saying "ahh" or by pressing down with a wooden tongue depressor such as your doctor has given you or even a spoon handle) so that you see the back wall of your throat, and not just your tongue or palate. Depending on your anatomy, this may be easier or harder for you to do.
3. Take a deep breath, hold it in, and aim the capsaicin spray straight back, attempting to hit the back wall of the throat, and not the front of the mouth. Immediately after spraying, exhale and swallow. You will feel the "heat" of the capsaicin.
4. Do not eat or drink anything for a minimum of 10 minutes both before and after using the spray. This is so that ingested substances do not inadvertently "neutralize" the capsaicin (particularly milk, citrus, salt, etc.).
5. To test for the first kind of possible benefit mentioned under Background (gradual depletion of Substance P), repeat the above four steps at least 4x per day for a minimum of 2 weeks.
6. Also, to test for the second kind of benefit (counter-irritant), pay attention during your minimum 2-week trial to whether using capsaicin at or just after the start of a coughing spell is helpful for you.
7. At the end of a minimum of 2 weeks, call Bastian Voice Institute (630.724.1100) and leave a message with staff or, if after hours, leave a recording on the Triage line by using the phone menu. Tell us:
 - a. if you've noticed any benefit;
 - b. if that benefit seems to be a decrease in overall coughing, or an ability to abort a particular coughing attack, or both;
 - c. by what percentage have your coughing symptoms been reduced (considering both frequency and severity together), if at all.