

PATIENT INFORMATION

Globus Pharyngeus

What is Globus Pharyngeus?

Globus Pharyngeus is the term applied to the sensation of a lump or discomfort in the throat. This is a fairly common condition and represents about 4% of new referrals to an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist.

What is the cause of Globus Pharyngeus?

The exact cause of Globus Pharyngeus remains unknown. There are many theories as to why people develop this condition. Amongst the popular theories are acid reflux from the stomach, muscular tension of the throat and voice box (larynx), failure of the muscle at the top of the gullet (cricopharyngeus muscle) to relax and stress.

What affects the globus symptoms?

The discomfort or irritation in the throat can be made worse by repeatedly clearing the throat or the constant action of swallowing. Stress and anxiety seem to make the problem worse. Discomfort may be temporarily relieved by eating or drinking.

Is Globus Pharyngeus related to throat cancer?

Globus Pharyngeus is not related to throat cancer. The doctor makes the diagnosis of Globus Pharyngeus only after he has discussed the symptoms, examined the throat, neck and the voice box of the patient and excluded more serious problems like cancer. The doctor may also request additional investigations in some patients.

What is the treatment of Globus Pharyngeus?

Reassurance by the doctor, avoidance of stress, repeated swallowing and throat clearing help with the symptoms. Your doctor may start you on medication to decrease the acid production from your stomach. The doctor may also refer you to a Speech and Language Therapist to give you exercises to relax the muscle tension in the throat and larynx.

Post nasal drip

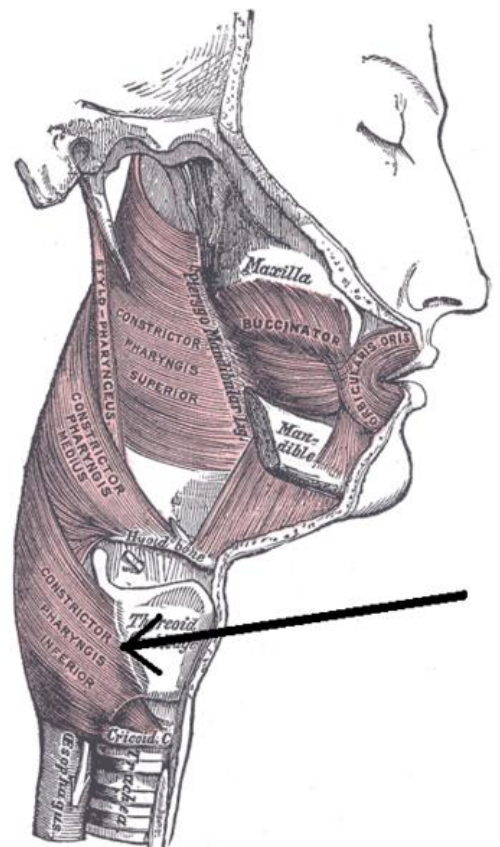
This is an excess of nasal mucus which runs down into the throat. This can make globus worse, partly because of constant swallowing and strain of the muscles and partly because of the direct effect of the mucus on the lining of the throat.

What can be done to help?

Many patients find that reassurance and explanation of the cause of their problem is all that is required to treat their globus. However, there are many treatments which are effective in more difficult cases. Since it is usually a multifactorial problem, it needs a variety of different treatment strategies. Your doctor will advise you as to the most appropriate treatments in your case but often will include anti-reflux medication and advice, speech therapy (physiotherapy for the muscles of the throat), treatments for nasal allergy and post nasal drip. If after treatment your problems persist, you should go back to your doctor and ask to be re-checked.

Where does the globus sensation come from?

There are many theories as to the cause of globus, none of which has been proven outright. However, most ENT surgeons now believe that globus arises as a result of muscle tension or non-coordination in the throat. The swallowing process is a complex reflex which involves many muscles, each of which must act in harmony with its neighbours. Some muscles have to relax, whilst others constrict (tense) in order to swallow correctly. In globus it seems most likely that one muscle in particular fails to relax properly; this is the cricopharyngeus. It is a circle of muscle at the bottom of the throat, which surrounds the top end of the gullet (oesophagus) and acts as a valve or sphincter. It helps to stop stomach contents refluxing back into the throat. This muscle has to relax to let food pass during normal swallowing. In globus, the cricopharyngeus muscle fails to relax sufficiently, and so swallowing saliva becomes difficult; however, when eating, food stimulates the inside of the throat and natural reflexes allow this muscle to relax correctly and swallowing occurs much more normally.



What triggers globus?

There are many factors which may trigger globus, and in most cases more than one are relevant, including:

Stress – Nearly all people with globus find that their symptoms are worse when they are stressed or anxious. This is partly due to the fact that stresses causes a general increase in muscle tension and also that any stress makes us more aware of any problem which we feel may interfere with our performance or life in general. If you are worried that you may have cancer, not surprisingly you become even more stressed and anxious, and the globus gets worse still.

Tiredness – Often the globus sensation is worse when we are tired, usually at the end of a busy day, especially if most of the day has been spent talking or on the phone.

Reflux – Many people with globus have reflux of stomach acid into the oesophagus or throat. Sometimes, this causes few symptoms directly but signs may be visible to your doctor on examination. The cricopharyngeus does not like acid washing over it, and this is often a cause of increased tension in this and other muscles in the throat. Stress causes an increase in stomach acid production as well.

Voice strain – Long periods of talking or use of the phone, presentations, public speaking, shouting or singing can all lead to overuse

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