



ARE YOU A CHRONIC THROAT CLEARER?

You are not alone!

The causes of chronic throat clearing include acid reflux (laryngopharyngeal reflux), allergies, environmental irritants (such as tobacco smoke and air pollution) and asthma. If present for a long time, **throat clearing can become habit forming**. When you clear your throat, you are transferring mucus from your throat to your mouth and nose. We all secrete up to two liters (imagine a big soft-drink bottle) of mucus a day. The mucus and saliva are usually swallowed and end up in the toilet eventually. By clearing the mucus back into your mouth and nose, you are sending the mucus in the wrong direction. This is counterproductive. Unless you are walking around spitting all day (which most throat clearers do not do), the mucus will work its way back down to the throat and eventually be swallowed. Get the mucus going in the right direction; drink water or juice and **Swallow! Swallow! Swallow! Do not do any throat clearing.**

Chronic throat clearing is damaging. The trauma from throat clearing can cause redness and swelling of your vocal cords. If the clearing is very excessive, small growths (granulomas) can form. These growths can get so large that they can eventually affect your voice and breathing. Surgical removal may be necessary. The irritation and swelling produced by the throat clearing can cause the mucus to sit in your throat. This causes more throat clearing. More throat clearing causes more stagnant mucus, which causes more throat clearing, which causes more mucus, etc. A vicious cycle will ensue, and the habit can be difficult to break. **Without a conscious effort on your part to break the cycle, the throat clearing will never stop.**

Your doctor may prescribe medication and behavioral modifications to treat acid reflux disease. Nose and throat sprays may be prescribed to treat underlying allergies or asthma. Avoiding possible irritants is recommended. Without changes to your behavior, these treatments will not be successful. We recommend the following alterations.

1. Do not clear your throat—swallow instead. This gets the mucus going in the right direction and prevents extra mucus from sitting in your throat.
2. Carry around water or juice to assist with swallowing and mucus clearance. When you feel the urge to clear your throat, take a sip of water or juice instead.
3. If you absolutely need to clear your throat, perform a gentle throat clearing. To do this, pant with your mouth open and say “HUH, HUH, HUH” with a powerful but very breathy voice. This will clear the secretions without causing damage.
4. Increase your water intake. This will thin secretions and make swallowing easier.
5. Comply with the behavior recommendations for reflux disease.
6. Chew baking soda (Arm & Hammer) gum. This can be found on the internet or in the toothpaste aisle of your pharmacy. Gum chewing can help with swallowing, reflux and throat clearing. Chew three pieces a day. If you develop jaw discomfort or headaches, decrease the amount of gum chewing.
7. Tell your friends and family to remind you to swallow when you clear your throat. Some people have been clearing so long that they don't even realize they are doing it.
8. Be patient. The urge to clear your throat will not go away overnight. It may take eight to 12 weeks for the medication and behavior modifications to work.