

# GLOBUS PHARYNGEUS

**You have been given a diagnosis of globus pharyngeus. This information sheet to help explain more about the condition.**

## **WHAT IS GLOBUS PHARYNGEUS?**

Globus pharyngeus is a medical term used to describe the sensation of a lump in the throat when no true lump exists.

## **WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF GLOBUS PHARYNGEUS?**

The majority of people will describe the constant sensation of a lump or a constriction in the throat that is present on swallowing and at rest. It is often painless and the sensation tends to improve when eating food. Some people will also describe a feeling of catarrh or phlegm sticking at the back of the throat that requires clearing.

## **WHAT ARE THE CAUSES?**

The underlying cause for globus pharyngeus is unknown and there are many theories. The most common theory is that is the tension in the muscles of swallowing (in particular the cricopharyngeus muscle). This muscle sits at the bottom of the throat and acts as a sphincter or valve at the top of the food pipe (oesophagus).

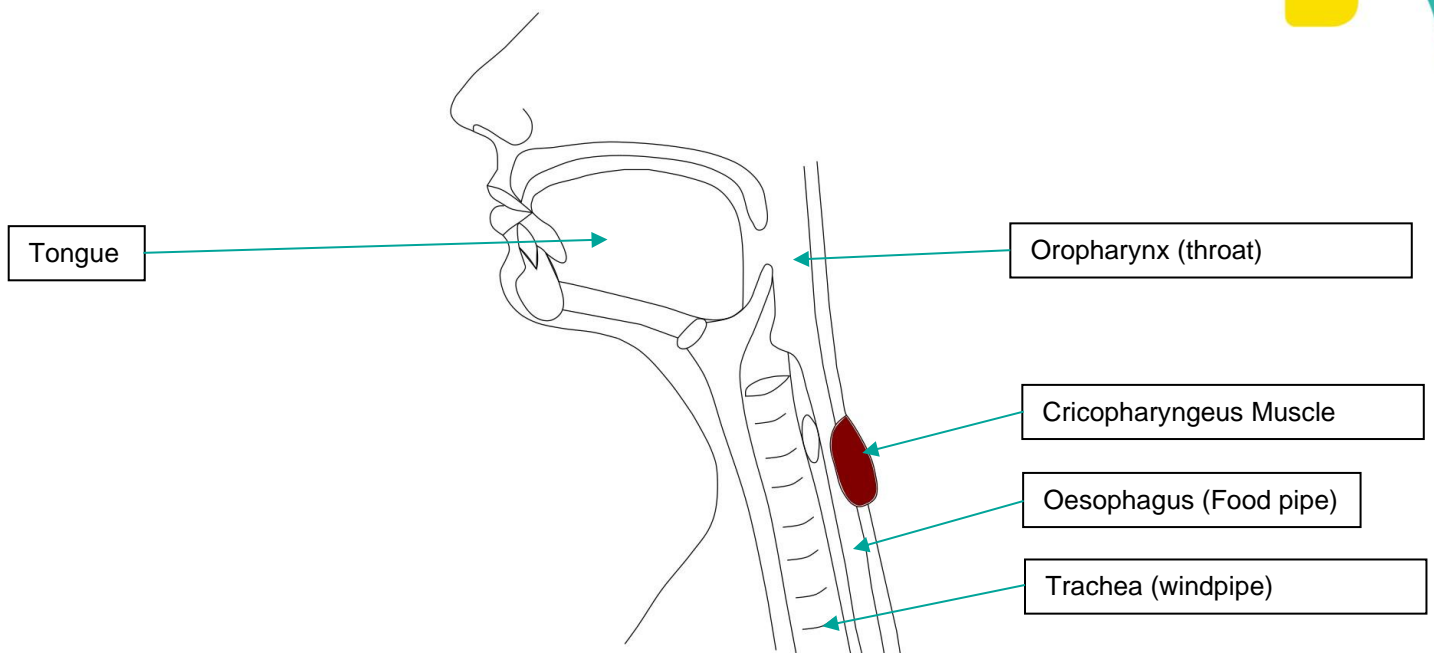


Figure 1 – picture of the throat and muscles.

There are many factors that can trigger globus pharyngeus and it is possible to have more than one trigger:

- **Reflux** – the most common cause of globus pharyngeus is acid refluxing up from the stomach. This is also known as extraoesophageal reflux or laryngopharyngeal reflux as the acid can affect the throat only and without any symptoms in the oesophagus or stomach such as heartburn or indigestion. The reflux can cause irritation of the cricopharyngeus muscle causing tension and inflammation.
- **Stress** – often people who develop globus pharyngeus can attribute the onset of their symptoms with a stressful period in their life. Stress can make reflux worse and therefore potentially making the globus symptoms worse. Anxiety around the possible diagnosis can also make symptoms worse.
- **Tiredness** – Often people will describe their symptoms being worse when they are more tired, usually at the end of the day or after a busy and stressful day
- **Voice strain** – Long periods of speaking or voice use can lead to straining of the muscles of the throat including the cricopharyngeus. Some people with globus pharyngeus may also find their voice fluctuates and they find the lump sensation is worse when their voice is particularly bad.
- **Smoking** – Not everyone who has globus pharyngeus smokes but smoking can make globus worse as it can cause irritation of the throat. Smoking can also make reflux worse.
- **Post nasal drip** – Mucus produced from the back of the nose can drip back down into the throat creating the sensation of something in the throat and the need to

clear the throat. Continually clearing the throat can also cause irritation of the throat making the globus worse.

## CAN GLOBUS REPRESENT A CANCER?

Understandably patients will worry about their symptoms and are often concerned that this may represent a cancer. Often they will be referred to an ENT specialist urgently for an assessment. This will involve a detailed discussion about your symptoms and an examination. This examination will involve feeling your neck, examining the back of your throat and pass a small flexible fibre-optic camera (flexible nasendoscopy) through your nose to examine your voice box and the opening of the food pipe.

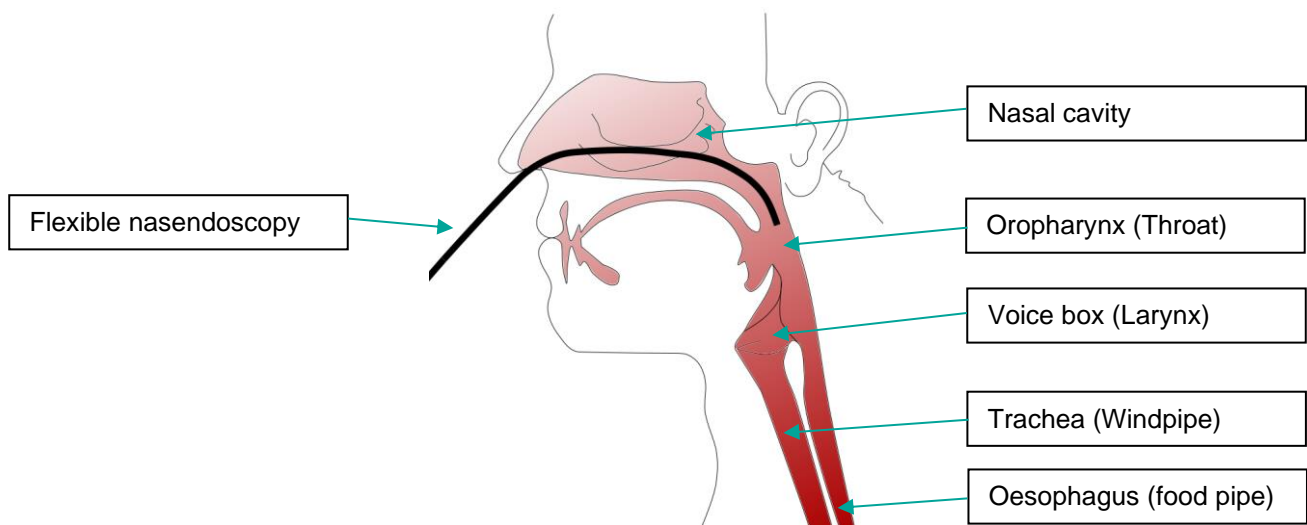


Figure 2 – picture of flexible nasendoscopy examination.

## ARE THERE ANY INVESTIGATIONS FOR GLOBUS PHARYNGEUS?

Often a detailed history of your symptoms with an examination of your throat with the fibre-optic camera will be able to diagnose globus pharyngeus. Usually the diagnosis of globus pharyngeus is very clear from the history and examination. It's unusual to require any further investigations.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE TO TREAT GLOBUS PHARYNGEUS?

Many patients find that an explanation and reassurance following examination can alleviate the symptoms of globus pharyngeus. It may also be necessary to treat or manage the underlying triggers of the symptoms:

- **Treatment of reflux** – this can be with medications and with changes to your diet or often both. Treatment for reflux of the throat will often take several weeks of months of continued treatment before you will notice an improvement.
- **Treatment of any post nasal drip** – with nasal steroid spray and saline nasal washes. You will need to use the sprays for several weeks before seeing any effect.

- **Treatment for allergies**
- **Speech and language therapy (SLT)** – In some cases you may be referred to SLT for treatment and this can be effective for symptoms such as voice strain or overuse, throat clearing and tension.

## WHAT CAN I DO TO IMPROVE MY SYMPTOMS?

There are many things you can consider doing to improve your symptoms:

- Ensure you keep well hydrated, avoiding too much coffee, alcohol and fizzy or acidic drinks.
- Stop throat clearing where possible. Try taking a sip of water instead of throat clearing.
- Try and address any stresses in your life or talk to your GP about ways to manage these.
- Stop smoking if you currently smoke.
- Consider weight loss if appropriate.

## WILL MY SYMPTOMS GET BETTER?

In the vast majority of cases your symptoms will get better. But if your symptoms do not improve after doing the above and having the appropriate treatment you should seek further advice from your GP and may require further investigations.

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