

Throat clearing

This information sheet is designed to give you more information on how to prevent the need to throat clear. This leaflet has been produced with the speech and language therapists and gives useful exercises and strategies to manage your symptoms.

How does the normal throat function?

Mucus is a fluid produced by mucous membranes. On a daily basis the nose produces about a litre, and the other mucous membranes produce a similar amount. It's a lubricant, and also helps fight infection.

The vocal cords/ folds are two tiny muscles that produce voice by vibrating air. In a woman they vibrate at around 220 times a second, a little less in men because their cords are thicker.

There are many tiny mucous glands surrounding the vocal folds. They continually secrete mucus for lubrication, and to help trap dust or irritants. It then moves upwards so that it can be swallowed. The mucus layer along the length of the vocal cords is necessary for vocal fold vibration – if this layer becomes dry, the cords cannot vibrate. Healthy vocal folds have a mucosal wave that moves along the length of the fold on vibration to produce speech.

How to keep my throat and voice box healthy?

In order to keep the mucus free flowing and able to do its job, we need to be well hydrated. This means drinking around **two litres of water** a day. Caffeinated drinks, alcohol and pure fruit juices can all dry out the mucous membranes. If mucus gets thick and sticky it becomes irritating and you may feel the need to cough and clear it. Coughing brings the vocal folds together forcefully, which causes them to become irritated and produce more mucus which in itself can be

an irritant and cause further coughing. As a result coughing can become a vicious cycle.

What can I do to stop throat clearing?

It is important to remember that you don't want to get rid of mucus as it is essential. Instead, try:

- Steam inhalation
- Increased water intake.
- Monitoring your own throat clearing or coughing. By being aware you can try to lessen it. Try to increase the time between each throat clear or cough
- Throat clearing can become habitual over time and to break the cycle you can explore alternatives to avoid coughing:
 - swallow twice
 - Yawn, then swallow
 - Open the throat in a silent yawn and huff
 - Do a quiet downward pitched 'mmm', then swallow
- If you have to clear your throat, do it as quietly and gently as possible.

Is there anything else that can cause the need to throat clear?

Acid reflux can also affect your throat and voice box. This is different to the reflux affecting your stomach and food pipe (oesophagus). Three of the main symptoms are too much mucus in the throat, excessive throat clearing and chronic cough. The sensation of heart burn is bottom of the list, and this type of reflux is sometimes described as 'silent reflux' as there is no pain with it. If you are aware of persistent and excessive mucus, talk to your Doctor about anti reflux medications.

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Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656.