

# Do Your Throat Symptoms Impact Your Daily Life? If So, You Are Not Alone!

By Boris Bentsianov MD

**M**illions of Americans suffer significant impact on their quality of life from bothersome chronic throat symptoms. The throat is the conduit for the air we breathe to enter the respiratory system and for food and drink to enter the gastrointestinal system. It is also essential in our ability to communicate with our voice and in protecting our airway. Although seemingly distinct and unrelated, many of these symptoms may share common etiologies.

This unique structure which is open to the outside world and plays such a critical role in regulating what and how things enter our body also puts your throat in the front line for suffering from a host of bothersome chronic systems. These include airway and breathing systems such as chronic cough, dry throat, itching and tickling, and phlegm or mucus build up. Other common symptoms can relate more to the throat's role in food passage such as difficulty or painful swallowing, a globus or "lump feeling", and clearing of the throat. Still, other symptoms can relate to irritation of the surface of your throat including pain, soreness, and surface changes such as white patches or swelling. Finally, some symptoms can affect the voice with hoarseness, vocal fatigue, or painful phonation.

Because of the sheer number, vagueness, and variability of these complaints, most patients tend to ignore these signs and symptoms or try home remedies and over-the-counter medications designed at

simply reducing the discomfort associated with these symptoms. These complaints are often trivialized by family, friends, and even primary care providers leading to further frustration and feeling helpless to improve one's condition.

The most common forms of acute irritation may be easily identified such as viral or bacterial infections or chemical irritants such as tobacco and alcohol. The more common chronic irritants can be much more difficult to identify and thus causes more significant long term sequelae. The most common symptoms of these irritants include post-nasal drip related frequently to sinus or allergy problems and laryngeal reflux related to acid or bile from the stomach. These conditions can cause throat symptoms often without the classic stigmata that most people recognize such as seasonal changes or runny nose for post nasal drip, and without the heartburn and stomach pain associated with classic acid reflux. This again can lead to many of these conditions going unrecognized for long periods and possibly lead to more serious and dangerous progressions of these disorders. This can lead to continued inflammation, infection, growths such as polyps, ulcers, or even the development of cancerous tumors.

Despite these challenges, there is hope for controlling these bothersome and destructive symptoms. With a good history and physical exam including a simple in-office laryngoscopy, your ENT physician can readily identify these conditions and create a targeted treatment plan to alleviate and cure these chronic ailments. Indeed, there may be no need to suffer in silence. Let's get control of these bothersome throat symptoms and improve your quality of life today.

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