



My Doctor Knows Dr Sushil Brito-Mutunayagam

FEELS LIKE A LUMP IN THE THROAT

Living with chronic throat irritation and globus sensation

GLOBUS pharyngeus, or the feeling a lump in the throat, can be a strange feeling, a tight feeling or the sensation of constriction around the neck.

What is important to remember is that it is a feeling or sensation of a lump, rather than an actual lump.

In about 70% of cases the symptoms are intermittent.

The feeling of a lump improves while eating, which is due to the reflex relaxation of the sphincter at the top of the food pipe while swallowing.

However if you look for the symptom, it tends to return.

Sometimes people will "test" the lump, and notice it is present when swallowing saliva.

The most common cause is stress or anxiety.

The sensation drives these people to think: Do I have a lump or blockage in my throat? Could I have a tumour or growth or cancer?

The concern regarding cancer, even if unlikely, will cause the tightening to persist and sometimes worsen, reinforcing the concern that something unpleasant is happening.

Laryngopharyngeal reflux is another cause.

This silent reflux occurs when the secretions of the stomach come back up the food pipe and cause irritation at the back of the throat.

It commonly gives rise to a globus type sensation.

This can also cause persistent throat-clearing, a husky voice, sore throat and cough.

Postnasal drip due to inflammation of the sinuses is another common cause.

Globus pharyngeus is a natural phenomenon. Once people have an understanding of the condition, the symptoms will gradually improve.

If stress is the main cause, then treating this is important by reducing or removing the stress if you can.

Sometimes treatment for acid reflux can be helpful.

This could be with lifestyle and dietary changes, and sometimes medicines can be helpful.

Postnasal drip can be a difficult symptom to treat, but it is often worth trying over the counter salt water sprays, and occasionally steroid or other sprays for the nose are prescribed.

Stop smoking as this causes gen-

eralised inflammation of the throat and airways.

Reducing the habit of throat-clearing which can cause mild inflammation in the throat and drinking sips of water will help relax the throat and improve hydration, which can also help symptoms of globus.

It is also best to avoid caffeinated and fizzy drinks and to minimise alcohol intake. Alcohol and caffeine both can dry the throat.

If the symptoms of globus persist, you should see an ENT surgeon who will conduct a full examination of the head and neck region, including the throat with a flexible telescope.

For patients who have globus, the sensation can be a real cause of anxiety.

The challenge for an ENT surgeon is to find the specific source of the globus while assuring the patient that he does not have a serious underlying problem like cancer.

In many people, the problem settles on its own with time.

Dr Sushil Brito-Mutunayagam is a consultant ENT surgeon at Subang Jaya Medical Centre

People with globus pharyngeus feel like there is a lump in the throat or the sensation of constriction around the neck.

