



Central West Specialists

Ear, Nose & Throat Specialist

GLOBUS

“Globus” is a spasm of the muscles of the lower throat. The name is derived from “globe” and literally means a “lump in the throat”. Globus is a very common problem, causing patients a great deal of worry. It is estimated that 45% of adults will experience the symptoms of GLOBUS. The patient describes the symptoms in a variety of ways:

- (i) “A sore throat” localized to the area of the voice box or below. The soreness is really more a vague rawness or dry feeling, but occasionally in severe cases the neck muscles can become tender with the ache extending up the neck muscles to behind the ear. There is NEVER any pain swallowing food or liquid, and in fact the discomfort should disappear at meal times.
- (ii) “Lump in the throat”, or “constriction” “narrowing” or “choking” feeling. Some people feel as if a “hair”, “crumb” or “apple peel” is caught in that region. Once again, this sensation should disappear at meal times.
- (iii) Intermittent “hoarseness” or “voice fatigue”. This will vary and will depend on the degree of cramping of the muscles. Of course, the voice always returns to normal at certain times of the day.
- (iv) “Phlegm catching” in the throat, or “excessive mucus” running down the back of the throat. The patient responds to this by clearing the throat and trying to get rid of the mucus.

ROLE OF MUCUS

Mucus is produced in our nose and sinuses continuously, and lines our nasal airways and filters the air like “fly paper”. It is meant to be sticky and contains anti-bodies that can kill many viruses and bacteria instantly. If we had no mucus production we would eventually die. The entire mucus lining of our nose is swept backwards every 10 minutes and passes through our throat and into our stomach. We really cannot stop this process, nor should we. Remember, young children never “clear their throats” and opera singers are taught not to clear their throats.

CAUSES OF GLOBUS

Many simple things affecting our throats, such as “coughs and colds”, after surgery, or scratches, can trigger off GLOBUS. If we happen to clear our throats or dry swallow the symptoms persist. Anxiety is a major factor for the symptoms recurring, and eventually this unknown “lump” can generate a fear of cancer. Acid reflux may be a factor in a small number of people.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis is made entirely on the patient’s symptoms, and the fact the patient tends to be clearing the throat and dry swallowing excessively. GLOBUS is never diagnosed if the patient is having trouble eating meals or drinking.

TREATMENT

Reassurance. The mechanism of the muscle spasm causing the constriction, or lump, causing the voice fatigue and the phlegm catching must be explained to the patient in order for reassurance to be effective. Anxiety factors should be mentioned as contributing to the symptoms. The patient must stop clearing the throat, and must stop repeatedly trying to swallow the “lump”; or else the

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symptoms will never disappear. Sips of water or sucking lozenges instead of clearing the throat or dry swallowing. The sips of water relax the muscles and allow the phlegm to go in the normal direction. Any significant acid reflux should be treated.

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