



Greenville Ear, Nose & Throat

Chronic Throat Clearing

You have been identified as a chronic throat clearer, but you are not alone. Causes of chronic throat clearing include acid reflux (laryngopharyngeal reflux), allergies, and environmental irritants such as tobacco smoke, air pollution and asthma.

If you clear your throat frequently, it can become a habit. When you clear your throat, you move mucus from your throat into your mouth and nose. We secrete up to 2 liters (imagine a big soda bottle) of mucus a day. This saliva usually is swallowed and ends up in the toilet. By clearing the mucus back into your mouth and nose, you are sending the saliva in the wrong direction.

Unless you spit throughout the day (as many throat clearers do), the mucus will work its way back down to the throat and eventually be swallowed—unless you continue to bring it back into your mouth and nose by clearing your throat. So why not get the mucus going in the right direction right away by swallowing?

Chronic throat clearing is damaging. Trauma from throat clearing can cause redness and swelling of your vocal cords. If the clearing is excessive, small growths (granulomas) can form. These granulomas can get so large that they can eventually affect your breathing. Surgery may be needed to remove them.

The irritation and swelling produced by throat clearing can cause saliva to sit in your throat, thus causing more throat clearing. More throat clearing causes more stagnant mucus, which causes more throat clearing, which causes more mucus, etc. A vicious cycle will ensue, and the habit can be very difficult to break. Without your help and a conscious effort on your part to break the cycle, the throat clearing will never stop.

Your doctor may prescribe medication and behavioral modification to treat acid reflux disease. Nose and throat sprays may be prescribed to treat allergies or asthma. Avoiding possible irritants will be suggested. Without changes to your behavior, these treatments will not be successful, however.

Here are 8 tips to help reduce the urge to clear your throat:

1. Do not clear your throat. Swallow instead. Swallowing gets the mucus going in the right direction—toward the toilet.
2. Carry water with you to help with swallowing and clearing mucus. When you feel the urge to clear your throat, take a sip of water instead.
3. If you **MUST** clear your throat, do it in a non-traumatic way. Here's how: Pant with your mouth open, saying "Huh, Huh, Huh" with a powerful but breathy voice. This technique will clear the secretions without causing damage.
4. Increase your water intake. Drinking more water will thin secretions and make it easier to swallow.
5. Follow behavior recommendations for reflux disease.
6. Chew baking soda (Arm & Hammer) gum. This gum can be found on the Internet or in the toothpaste aisle of your pharmacy. Chewing gum can help with swallowing, reflux and throat clearing. Chew three pieces a day. If you develop jaw discomfort or headaches, chew less gum.
7. Have friends and family tell you to swallow when you clear your throat. Some people have been clearing their throat for so long that they don't even know when they are doing it.
8. Be patient. The urge to clear your throat will not go away overnight. It may take 8-12 weeks for medication and behavior modification to work.

Please call our office if you have questions about this information:

- Patewood (864) 454-4368
- Greer (864) 797-9400