



Are you a chronic throat clearer? You are not alone!

What causes chronic throat clearing?

The causes of chronic throat clearing include acid reflux (laryngopharyngeal or extraesophageal reflux), allergies, environmental irritants such as tobacco smoke and air pollution, and asthma. If present for a long time, throat clearing can become habit forming. When you clear your throat, you are transferring mucus from your throat to your mouth and nose. We secrete up to two liters of mucus per day. This mucus and saliva is usually swallowed and excreted. By clearing the mucus back in your mouth and nose, you are sending the mucus in the wrong direction. Get the mucus going in the right direction and drink water and swallow.



Chronic throat clearing is damaging—the trauma can cause redness and swelling of your vocal cords. If the clearing is very extensive, small growths called granulomas can form. If these granulomas get large, they can affect your breathing and your voice and may require surgery for removal. The irritation and swelling produced by the throat clearing can cause even more mucus production, which causes more throat clearing. More throat clearing causes more stagnant mucus which causes more throat clearing, which causes more mucus, and etc. This develops into a vicious cycle that can be difficult to break. Without a conscious effort to break it, the throat clearing will not stop.

How is throat clearing treated?

Your doctor may prescribe medication and behavioral modifications to treat acid reflux disease. Nose and throat sprays may be prescribed to treat underlying allergies or asthma. Avoiding possible irritants is recommended as well. However, without changes in behavior, these treatments will not be successful. The following modifications are recommended:

1. Do not clear your throat. Swallow instead to get the mucus going in the right direction.
2. Carry water at all times to assist with swallowing and mucus clearing. When you feel like you want to clear your throat, take a sip of water instead.
3. If you absolutely need to clear your throat, perform a gentle throat clear. To do this, pant with the mouth open and say “HUH, HUH, HUH” with a powerful, but breathy voice. This will clear the mucus without damaging your vocal cords.
4. Increase your water intake. This will thin your mucus and make it easier to swallow.
5. Comply with behavioral modifications for reflux disease.
6. Chew baking soda (Arm & Hammer) gum, which can be found on the internet or in the toothpaste aisle of the market. Gum chewing can help with swallowing, reflux, and throat clearing. Stop chewing gum if you develop jaw discomfort or headaches.
7. Tell your friends and family to tell you to swallow when you clear your throat. Some people have been clearing their throat for so long, they do not realize 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 the medications and behavior modifications to work.

