



GLOBUS: A FEELING OF A LUMP IN THE THROAT

This leaflet explains what globus - a sensation of having a lump in the throat - is, what triggers it and how it may be treated. Today you have had an examination which has ruled out serious conditions such as throat cancer.

What is globus?

Globus is the medical term for a sensation of a lump in the throat where no true lump exists. It was once called Globus Hystericus, wrongly suggesting that this is a psychiatric condition. Globus is sometimes also referred to as Globus pharyngeus (pharyngeus is simply the medical term for the throat).

What are the usual symptoms in globus?

The main symptom is a feeling of a lump, constriction (tension), or tightness in the throat. Many patients find that the symptoms vary a good deal and there are often periods when this feeling goes altogether. Despite the feeling of a difficulty swallowing, patients with globus do not have problems eating or drinking and usually notice their symptoms most when swallowing their own saliva. The sensation of a lump sometimes moves up and down, and occasionally from side to side also, but is usually central at the front of the neck. It is not uncommon to find minor voice problems such as huskiness, hoarseness or tiring of the voice in patients with globus.

Where does the globus sensation come from?

There are many theories as to the cause of globus, none of which has been proven outright. However, most ENT surgeons now believe that globus arises because of muscle tension or non-coordination in the throat. The swallowing process is a complex reflex which involves many muscles, each of which must act in harmony with its neighbours. Some muscles must relax, whilst others constrict (tense) to swallow correctly. In globus it seems most likely that one muscle in particular fails to relax properly; this is the cricopharyngeus.

It is a circle of muscle at the bottom of the throat, which surrounds the top end of the gullet (oesophagus) and acts as a valve or sphincter. It helps to stop stomach contents refluxing back into the throat. This muscle must relax to let food pass



during normal swallowing. In globus, the cricopharyngeus muscle fails to relax sufficiently, and so swallowing saliva becomes difficult; however, when eating, food stimulates the inside of the throat and natural reflexes allow this muscle to relax correctly and swallowing occurs much more normally.

What triggers globus?

There are many factors which may trigger globus, and in most cases more than one are relevant, including:

- **Stress:** Nearly all people with globus find that their symptoms are worse when they are stressed or anxious. This is partly because stress causes a general increase in muscle tension and also that any stress makes us more aware of any problem which we feel may interfere with our performance or life in general. If you are worried that you may have a cancer, not surprisingly you become even more stressed and anxious, and the globus gets worse still.
- **Tiredness:** Often the globus sensation is worse when we are tired, usually at the end of a busy day, especially if most of the day has been spent talking or on the phone.
- **Reflux:** Many people with globus have reflux of stomach acid into the oesophagus or throat. Sometimes, this causes few symptoms directly but signs may be visible to your doctor on examination. The cricopharyngeus does not like acid washing over it, and this is often a cause of increased tension in this and other muscles in the throat. Stress causes an increase in stomach acid production as well.
- **Voice strain:** Long periods of talking or use of the phone, presentations, public speaking, shouting or singing can all lead to overuse or misuse of the voice and throat muscles leading to increased tension in these muscles and globus.
- **Smoking:** Not all patients with globus smoke but smoking certainly makes globus worse. It also causes an increase in stomach acid production. It's also a risk factor for getting many kinds of cancer in the future, including throat cancer, so NOW is a great time to stop!



What can be done to help?

Many patients find that reassurance and explanation of the cause of their problem is all that is required to treat their globus. Most of the time it's annoying but not dangerous. It's not a sign that more serious problems will arise later.

- Drink more water, a minimum of 1.5 litres (3 pints) per day in addition to any tea/coffee/cola. Flavouring water with cordial may help you increase your intake. Continual sipping is most beneficial because swallowing helps to relax the throat.
- Avoid drinking more than 4 cups of coffee/tea/cola per day. Not only do these drinks have a drying effect on the throat, but they can act as a diuretic, causing extra water loss from your body via your urine.
- Stop any bad habits, such as shouting, raising your voice or throat clearing (swallow instead). These behaviours create unnecessary tension in the throat and can lead to globus sensation.

HEAD AND NECK RELAXATION EXERCISES

Exercise 1 - Neck and Shoulders

1. Drop your chin down towards your chest; hold it there for about 10 seconds before raising back to centre.
2. Drop your head sideways towards your shoulder, keeping your shoulders straight. Hold it for 10 seconds before raising back to centre. Repeat on the opposite side.
3. Shrug your shoulders up to your ears. Hold the position for a few seconds and then relax, dropping your shoulders to their resting position. Repeat this 5 times.
4. Hold your arms out in front of you, as if you are pushing something away from you. Stretch out as far as you can. Gently drop your arms to your sides as you relax. Repeat this 3 times.



5. Push your shoulders forwards as if attempting to make them meet at the front. Push your shoulder blades backwards as if attempting to make them meet at the back. Relax and repeat 5 times.

Exercise 2 - Abdominal Breathing

1. Sit comfortably in a chair and place your hands on your tummy.
2. Blow out sharply, as if blowing up a balloon. As you blow out, your tummy and hands should move in.
3. Your shoulders and upper chest should be still and relaxed. At the end of the breath out, relax your tummy; it should expand naturally, allowing your lungs to re-inflate.
4. When you feel comfortable with this technique, produce a soft /sss/ sound on the out-breath.

Exercise 3 - Yawn / Sigh

Yawning is a very good technique for relaxing the muscles in the throat. As the name suggests, you yawn on an in-breath and softly release a sigh on an out-breath.

Exercise 4 - Chewing method

This technique is used to relax tight jaws or tongues. Imagine you are chewing a toffee by moving your lips, tongue, and jaw in a smooth, circular motion. Imagine the toffee is getting bigger and bigger so the movements in your mouth will need to get bigger and bigger.

Exercise 5 - Tongue movement

Moving your tongue slowly around the outside of your teeth with your lips closed also helps to get rid of tension from the larynx (voice box). Do this 10 times one way, then 10 times the other for one minute several times per day.

Additional treatments

There are some people for whom treatments are helpful. Often this will include anti-reflux medication and advice, speech therapy (physiotherapy for the muscles of the throat) or treatments for nasal allergy.



How do I know when to be worried?

If after examination your problems change to include:

- Pain on swallowing
- Difficulty getting food down
- Weight loss
- Lumps in the neck

You should go back to your doctor and ask to be re-checked.