

CATARRH (patient information leaflet)

What is catarrh?

- Catarrh is a condition that is very common but yet very difficult to describe well. It means different things to different people.
- Some people use the term catarrh to describe mucus at the back of their nose, build-up of phlegm in their throat, continuous urge to clear the throat.
- People who suffer from catarrh say that they experience the sensation most of the time and often for many years. People with chronic or long standing catarrh usually describe the feeling of having a constant cold but without any of the symptoms of cold.

Two types of catarrh

- There are some patients who experience catarrh with an excess of mucus that actually runs out of their nose (known as rhinitis).
- There are other patients, however, who experience the same sensation of an excess of mucus but are unable to clear anything out of their nose or their throat, this can be frustrating for them.

What causes catarrh?

The exact causes are unsure, but research suggests that it is not related to allergy nor due to any abnormality the way mucus is transported with in the nose. It is possible that catarrh may be due to abnormality of feeling in the lining of back of the nose and throat. This may explain why so many patients find it difficult to spit out the mucus that they are sensing at the back of the throat.

What are the symptoms of catarrh?

Apart from the sensation of mucus at the back of nose and throat or persistent desire to clear throat, patients may also notice

- Sensation of nasal congestion,
- Ineffective nose blowing,
- Throat discomfort,
- Crackling or dragging sensation in the ears,
- Sensation of choking or something stuck in the throat,
- Constant cough or of feeling sick.

How is catarrh diagnosed?

There is no diagnostic test for catarrh. It is based only on a sensation that patient feels. The research shows that tests for allergy, tests of mucus flow and CT scans, X-rays of the sinuses are not helpful in the management of people who experience chronic catarrh.

How to approach catarrh?

- Self-help is probably the most important part of managing catarrh. It is worth bearing in mind that although patients have the intense feeling of phlegm in the back of their nose or throat, it is quite possible that this is more to do with the feeling within the lining rather than an actual build-up of mucus, furthermore, although catarrh patients often find their

condition frustrating and disgusting, it is worth remembering that mucus is not in any way harmful to the body.

- Persistent throat clearing often becomes a vicious cycle whereby the action of clearing your throat actually worsens and perpetuates the situation. It is therefore worth trying to avoid clearing throat and sipping iced water is useful in suppressing the urge to do so.
- Some patients report an improvement in their symptoms from avoiding dairy products in their diet although there is no research at the moment to say whether or not this is truly beneficial.
- Over-the-counter catarrh cures are okay to them but many people find these unhelpful.
- Unfortunately chronic catarrh does seem to be a problem that affects people for many years of their life regardless of the remedies that they take. It is therefore worth finding ways to adapt to symptoms and ways to lessen them, rather than looking for a fix or a cure. Salt water nasal rinses are helpful for lessening the symptoms of catarrh and are simple to make and administer.

How is catarrh treated?

There are unfortunately no cures of chronic catarrh; it is quite possible that those catarrh sufferers who also have runny nose will benefit from a steroid nasal spray. Those who do not have a runny nose do not usually find such sprays helpful. On the whole, antibiotics do not seem to be helpful.

Simple remedies such as saline nasal rinses, which can be made at home or purchased over the counter at a pharmacist, are reported by some sufferers to give partial relief of their symptoms, these need to be used regularly (3 or 4 times per day) and over a long period of time, for as long as it provides benefit.

No reliable information available on homeopathy is proven to help for catarrh.

How would your doctor monitor your condition?

Because chronic catarrh is known to affect people for so long without any real change in their symptoms, it is possible that GP or specialist feel it is not necessary to monitor patients for this problem. That is not to say that they don't believe that patient's symptoms are genuine, but rather that they are happy that the symptoms do not indicate anything worrying or serious. If patients experience new symptoms, such as blocked nose, runny nose, impairment of smell, sinus pain, sore throat, change in your voice or difficulty with swallowing, they should inform their doctor about it.

Further information: www.entuk.org