

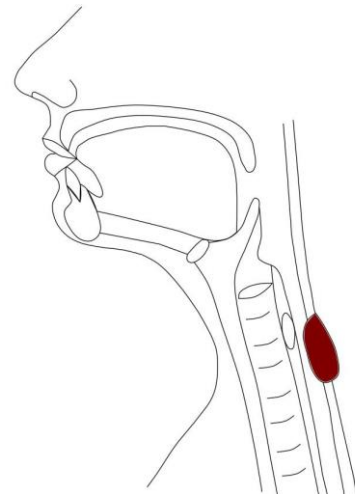
# GLOBUS

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Globus is often described as the feeling of a lump or a sensation of ‘pressure’ in the throat. Some people report a tightness or constriction, or a feeling of mucus (a sticky substance produced by the body) that they are unable to clear. Others may notice that they have the sensation most when swallowing saliva, but may also find that the symptoms improve when eating and drinking. These sensations can increase with stress and worry. Once you feel the ‘lump in your throat’, it is only natural to wonder what has caused it and you may start ‘testing’ to see if it is still there by swallowing again and again. The more you swallow, the drier your mouth gets and the bigger the lump can feel. The important thing to remember is that globus is just an abnormal sensation of a lump, rather than an actual lump or growth.

## WHAT ARE THE CAUSES?

The underlying cause for globus is unknown and there are many theories. The most common theory is that the sensation is caused by tension in the muscles of swallowing (in particular, the cricopharyngeus muscle). This muscle sits at the bottom of the throat and acts as a sphincter or valve at the top of the food pipe (oesophagus).



One or many factors can trigger or contribute to globus:

- **Reflux** – acid can reflux up from the stomach. This is also known as extraoesophageal reflux or laryngopharyngeal reflux as the acid can affect the throat only and without any symptoms in the oesophagus or stomach, such as heartburn or indigestion. The reflux can cause irritation of the cricopharyngeus muscle, causing tension and inflammation.
- **Stress** – often people who develop globus can attribute the onset of their symptoms with a stressful period in their life. Anxiety regarding the possible diagnosis can also make symptoms worse. Additionally, stress can make reflux worse and therefore potentially make the globus symptoms worse.
- **Tiredness** – Often people will describe their symptoms being worse when they are more tired, usually at the end of the day or after a busy and stressful day.
- **Voice strain** – Long periods of speaking or voice use can lead to straining of the muscles of the throat including the cricopharyngeus. Some people with globus may also find their voice fluctuates, and the lump sensation can feel worse when their voice is particularly bad.
- **Smoking** – Globus can occur in people who have never smoked. However, smoking can make globus worse as it can cause irritation of the throat. Smoking can also make reflux worse.
- **Post-nasal drip** – Mucus produced in the nose can drip back down into the throat creating the sensation of something in the throat and the need to clear the throat. Continually clearing the throat can also cause irritation of the throat, making the globus worse.

## HOW IS GLOBUS DIAGNOSED?

Globus is usually diagnosed in an Ear, Nose and Throat clinic, in order to rule out any physical causes. The doctor will usually pass a small thin tube with a camera through your nose to view your nasal cavity, back of the mouth and throat. They may also feel your neck and look in your mouth. The vast majority of patients with globus have nothing to worry about; cancer of the throat is not related to globus and is uncommon. However, if your doctor has any concerns they may organise additional examinations such as a barium swallow (X-ray of the throat and oesophagus) or an endoscopy (a look down the throat with anaesthetic).

## WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR GLOBUS?

For many people with globus, understanding the reasons for their symptoms may be all that is needed. For others, various treatments may be suggested including:

- treatment for acid reflux, include medicines and diet changes
- treatment for postnasal drip, e.g. nasal spray
- treatment for stress, if this is a problem
- stopping smoking

## WHAT CAN I DO TO REDUCE THE GLOBUS SENSATION?

You should be reassured there is nothing blocking your throat or concerning in your throat. There are lots of things you can do to help.

- **Food and drink**
  - Drink lots of liquids in a day – aim for 1½ -2 litres of water per day.
  - Drink water with meals to avoid swallowing anything too dry.
  - Avoid coffee, too much alcohol, excessive amounts of tea, and fizzy or acidic drinks.
  - Drink water or diluted cordials.
  
- **Avoid throat clearing**

This habit causes more tightness in your throat, does not get rid of the lump sensation, and aggravates the edges of your vocal cords. If you feel that you have some mucus to clear from your throat, do not clear your throat. Instead have a drink to wash it away or do a silent huff (a sharp exhalation with your mouth open) and a strong gulp to clear it.
  
- **Medicines**

Take any prescribed antacid medication regularly and at the correct times of the day. Do not suddenly stop taking them but discuss a gradual ‘step-down’ programme with your doctor.
  
- **Stress**
  - Stress in your life can make you feel tense and may increase the feeling of a lump in your throat. Try to relax by whatever means are realistic for you and your situation.
  - If you are feeling tearful, but trying not to cry, you may also feel a lump in your throat. This is normal. Allow yourself to cry – it should help to ease the sensation.
  - Try to find a way, or someone, to help you manage your stress and/or sadness. Look carefully at your lifestyle to see how you can introduce more relaxation, just for you to unwind. Take up a relaxing hobby such as yoga, walking, meditation, or tai chi. Set aside a specific time just to read, listen to music, or do something creative. Be prepared to delegate work and/or responsibility to others. Look at symptoms and see when they become worse - is there a pattern of tension relating to a certain time of day and/or situation that you could address?
  - Listen to a relaxation tape each night before you go to bed.
  
- **Exercises**

Try these specific exercises to stretch and relax the muscles in your head, neck, and shoulders. Doing these exercises to slow quiet music can be helpful.

  1. Sit tall and let your shoulders and arms hang comfortably. Do not let your head poke forwards or loll backwards.
  2. Lift your shoulders to your ears - hold them to the count of six, then drop them. Repeat three times.
  3. Look over your left shoulder, hold it, then look over your right shoulder. Repeat three times.
  4. Tilt your head down to your left shoulder, hold it for the count of three, then tilt it to the right shoulder. Repeat this sequence three times.
  5. Drop your head down onto your chest and very slowly and gently roll your head up to one shoulder, open your mouth as you roll it round to the other shoulder, and slowly back down onto your chest. Hold this position for a few seconds, then slowly raise your head. Repeat this exercise going round in the other direction.
  6. Screw up your face and hands as tightly as you can - hold it for six seconds, then relax.

## WILL MY SYMPTOMS GET BETTER?

In the vast majority of cases your symptoms will get better. The sensation may vary and there may be periods where the irritation is gone altogether.

However, if your symptoms do not improve after doing the above and taking the appropriate treatment you should seek further advice from your GP and may require further investigations.