



POST-NASAL DRIP

What is post-nasal drip?

Glands in your sinuses, nose, and throat produce 1-2 quarts of mucus per day that is normally swallowed subconsciously. Mucus functions to humidify air, trap and clear inhaled foreign matter, fight infection, and moisten and clean membranes of the nose. The feeling of mucus accumulating in the throat or dripping from the back of the nose is called post-nasal drip or postnasal drainage. It can be caused by increased secretions or by disorders of the throat and/or swallowing muscles.

What causes post-nasal drip?

Increased secretions can be thick or thin depending on the cause. Increased thin secretions are often a result of allergies, colder temperatures, eating spicy foods, pregnancy, hormonal changes, various medications, or structural abnormalities (e.g. deviated nasal septum). Increased thick secretions are often a result of dryness in heated buildings, food allergies, or sinus infections.

How is post-nasal drip treated?

You should consult your Ear, Nose, and Throat provider to correctly determine the underlying source of your post-nasal drip. General measures may be recommended that will allow mucus secretions to pass more easily. These measures include the following:

- Adequate daily hydration. We recommend drinking eight, 8oz glasses of water each day. Proper hydration keeps mucus membranes moist and aids in thinning secretions.
- Mucus thinning medications (e.g. Mucinex or Robitussin) can help to thin post-nasal drip.
- Saline nasal spray (e.g. Ocean or Ayr), 4 sprays to each nostril 4 times per day. This works to keep the mucus membranes of the nose moist.

If a source can be identified, treatment will vary depending on the cause:

- Antibiotic treatment if increased post-nasal drip is the result of underlying bacterial infection.
- Proper management of allergies. Routine use of oral antihistamines (e.g. Allegra, Claritin, or Zyrtec) or steroid nasal sprays (e.g. Nasacort or Flonase) may offer relief from increased secretions caused by exposure to allergens.
- Proper management of gastroesophageal reflux (GER). This may include lifestyle changes such as elevating the head of the bed by 6 inches, avoiding eating 2 hours prior to bedtime, and eliminating triggering food groups (e.g. caffeine, acidic/spicy foods, chocolates). Your provider may also prescribe medications to help minimize or turn off the production of stomach acid.

How is swallowing affected?

Post-nasal drip can often lead to an irritated throat which can cause discomfort or a sensation of a lump in the throat. Proper treatment of post-nasal drip can often eliminate these symptoms. For some people, problems with swallowing may lead to the accumulation of liquids/solids in the throat that may feel like post-nasal drip. When the muscles and nerves of the mouth and throat are not functioning properly, secretions can spill into breathing passages or onto the voice box leading to hoarseness or throat clearing cough. Factors that can contribute to swallowing problems include the following:

- Age. Swallowing muscles can gradually lose strength and coordination over time, leading to difficulty.
- Sleep. While asleep, swallowing occurs less frequently, and secretions can build up. This will often result in throat clearing and coughing upon waking up.
- Stress. When under stress or when nervous, throat muscles can spasm often, leading to the sensation of a lump in the throat.
- Growths. Masses in the throat or swelling of the throat can slow or even prevent the movement of liquids or solids.