

Throat changes after COVID-19

COVID-19 enters the body through the nose, mouth and eyes. Some people report a sore throat, throat discomfort and dryness during a COVID-19 illness. This can carry on afterwards causing throat sensitivity.



As a result these are some common throat symptoms:

- Dry coughing to sprays, smells, cold air and other things in the air
- A tickly or sore throat, that may be worse in the morning
- Coughing with dry or crumbly foods
- The sensation of a lump in the throat or food sticking
- Tightness in the throat or the feeling of being 'strangled'
- Aching in the muscles of the throat after talking
- A sensation of too much mucus in the throat
- Repeatedly clearing the throat or coughing to clear mucus
- Feeling that it is harder to breathe in and feeling sudden breathlessness. Ask your GP for a referral to an Ear, Nose and Throat doctor if this is happening to you

What can help?

One of the best ways to make your throat feel better is to drink more. Here are some ways to do this:



Take small sips of water little and often throughout the day



Try a motivational water bottle or set regular alarms



Aim for 6-8 glasses of non-caffeinated fluid e.g. water, squash, herbal tea



Reduce how much caffeine you drink e.g. tea, coffee, energy drinks, cola as these can increase the risk of dehydration

Ways to reduce throat tightness, 'a lump in the throat' feeling

Some people develop the feeling of a lump in the throat after COVID-19. This 'lump' sensation is caused by muscle tightening. Knowing this can be reassuring. Here are some things that can reduce this feeling:

- Pretending to chew a toffee (moving the lower jaw up and down) or pretending to stifle a yawn (yawning with your mouth closed) can reduce the feeling of a lump in the throat when it happens.
- Repeat the chewing or yawning as many times as you like (usually 5-6 times in a row) until the lump feeling softens.

It is important to speak to your GP if you have changes to the sensations in your throat affecting breathing, swallowing and / or talking.

Ways to reduce coughing

The throat can get irritated with a virus, like COVID-19. When the throat is irritated and sensitive it produces mucus or phlegm to lubricate itself. Because the throat is sensitive, it can feel like there is too much mucus.

You may have a strong urge to cough. This will ease over time. Repeat any of the strategies below that helps you to control the urge to cough. Repeat even if you have started coughing.

Notice when you start to feel the need to cough, then do one of the following:

- Instead of coughing, sharply sniff in through your nose (shoulders down) and do a long blow out with rounded lips and puffy cheeks.
- Press your tongue up into the roof of your mouth for 5 seconds then swallow.
- Take a sip of water, put your chin on your chest and swallow.

Repeat any strategy until the urge to cough passes.

Remember, the more you cough the more you need to cough. The less you cough, the less you need to cough.

If you are worried about coughing and clearing your throat excessively after COVID-19, ask your GP to refer you to a chest (respiratory) doctor. They can refer you to a specialist speech and language therapy service.

Ways to loosen or reduce mucus

Inhaling steam can help to loosen mucus. Aim for five minutes twice a day breathing in through your mouth. You may use a bowl, towel and hot water or buy a steam inhaler cup. **Do not** add anything e.g. mint / menthol / herbs to the water. Make use of times when you are in a steamy room e.g. when showering, to breath in steam through your mouth.



Sucking on a sugar free sweet can keep your mouth and throat moist. Avoid cough or throat sweets (e.g. Halls lozenges) as these can have a drying effect.



Try reducing dairy products from your diet as these can increase mucus in your throat.



Pineapple juice and papaya juice can be particularly good at thinning thick mucus.



Ways to reduce mucus at the back of the nose

- A steroid nasal spray from your GP to help a constant runny nose
- A saline spray such as Sterimar
- Saline nasal rinses at home to ease nasal congestion (use 3-4 x per day)

Getting help with your symptoms

Voice change, coughing and throat changes are common after COVID-19. If they continue for more than 12 weeks or worsen, please talk to your GP. Your GP can refer you to a Post Covid Service or a speech and language therapist who can help you to improve your symptoms and reduce the impact on your life.