

Catarrh

Catarrh is a build-up of mucus in an airway or cavity of the body.

It usually affects the back of the nose, the throat or the sinuses (air-filled cavities in the bones of the face).

It's often temporary, but some people experience it for months or years. This is called chronic catarrh.

Catarrh can be annoying and difficult to get rid of. But it's not harmful and there are treatments.

Symptoms linked to catarrh

Catarrh can lead to a:

- constant need to clear your throat
- feeling that your throat is blocked
- blocked or stuffy nose that you can't clear
- runny nose
- feeling of mucus running down the back of your throat
- persistent cough
- headache or facial pain
- reduced sense of smell and taste
- crackling sensation in your ear
- temporary hearing loss

These problems can be frustrating to live with and may affect your sleep, making you feel tired.

Treatments for catarrh

Catarrh will often pass in a few days or weeks as the condition that causes it improves.

There are things you can try to relieve your symptoms, such as:

- avoid things that trigger your symptoms, such as allergens or smoky places
- sip cold water when you need to clear your throat
- use a saline nasal rinse – you can buy this from a pharmacy

- avoid warm, dry places (such as those with air conditioning and car heating systems)
- place plants or bowls of water in a room to help to keep the air humid
- stay hydrated
- talk to a pharmacist about over-the-counter medications (decongestants, antihistamines or steroid nasal sprays)

There are several remedies, such as herbal medicines, in health shops and pharmacies that claim to treat catarrh.

Some people find these helpful, but there's little evidence to suggest they work.

When to see your GP

Speak to your GP if your catarrh persists and is becoming difficult to live with.

They may want to rule out conditions that could be causing it, such as [nasal polyps](#) or allergies. They may refer you to a specialist.

If you're diagnosed with an underlying condition, treating that can relieve your catarrh. Nasal polyps, for example, can be treated with a steroid nasal spray or, in some cases, surgery.

Chronic catarrh can be hard to treat and may last a long time.

Causes of catarrh

Catarrh usually occurs when the immune system reacts to an infection or irritation. This causes the lining of your nose and throat to become swollen and produce mucus.

Triggers include:

- [a cold](#) or other infection
- [hay fever](#) or other types of allergic rhinitis
- non-allergic rhinitis
- nasal polyps

It's unclear what causes chronic catarrh, but it's not thought to be the result of an allergy or infection.

It might be from a problem in the way mucus travels through the nose. It could also be caused by a sensitivity to mucus in the back of the nose and throat.

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