**Why is throat clearing detrimental to the voice?**

Throat clearing is often more of a habit than a necessity. When you cough or clear your throat your vocal cords are brought together forcefully. If you do this a lot the vocal cords begin to get irritated and glands above the vocal cords produce mucous to try and lubricate the vocal cords and protect them. However, when we feel like we have mucus in our throats, the tendency is to try and clear it by throat clearing!! This creates a vicious cycle because the more we do this the more mucous is created and the more we feel the need to clear our throat or cough.

Put simply, the more we throat clear the more mucus is produced which leads to more throat clearing and more mucus being produced. **where does it end?!** It may end in changes to the structure of the vocal cords and worsening of voice symptoms.

**Breaking the Habit**

Very often, throat clearing can become a habit- something that we may not even be aware of doing. This is a habit that can be detrimental to our voices. This habit can be broken. Consider the following advice;

1. **Increase hydration of the vocal folds and their lubrication levels**
   
   Try and build steam inhalations into your day (no added menthol etc) and try to maximise your water intake.

2. **Monitor your own throat clearing and coughing**

   Throat clearing is only a habit we can break if we are aware that we are doing it! Count or ask someone else to - how many times you throat clear / cough in an hour. Become aware of this throat clearing pattern and try to lessen it- even slightly will be beneficial. If coughing or throat clearing has become a habitual behaviour, set increasing periods to stop yourself from coughing/ throat clearing.

3. **Explore alternatives to throat clearing / coughing. Suggestions are:**

   a) having a sip of water (also beneficial for promoting fluid intake)
   b) swallowing twice- the first swallow may move the mucus from on the vocal cords, and the second swallow may carry the mucus down to the stomach
   c) sucking a sugar free sweet (promotes the swallow)
   d) yawn and swallow
   e) do a very quiet low pitch ‘mmm,’ and then swallow
f) open the throat by a wide silent yawn, and then strongly ‘huff’ the air out by contracting the abdominal (tummy) muscles- this may help blow the mucus off the vocal cords

Sometimes you have to clear the throat of phlegm or an irritation; in these instances, cough or throat clear as gently and quietly as possible.

Contact Details for Further Information

If you require any further information please contact the Speech and Language Therapy Department on Tel: 01472 875405 for Grimsby and 01724 290043 for Scunthorpe.

Any Comments, Compliments, Concerns or Complaints

If you have any other concerns please talk to your nurse, therapist or doctor. Our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) are available on 03033 306518 (Grimsby, Scunthorpe and Goole). You can also contact nlg-tr.PALS@nhs.net

As a Trust we value equality of access to our information and services, therefore alternative formats available on request at nlg-tr.interpreters@nhs.net

IFP-0845 v1.1 Issue date: Mar 2019. Review date: Mar 2022