How would your doctor monitor your condition?

Because chronic catarrh is known to affect people for so long without any real change in their symptoms, it is possible that your doctor or your specialist will not feel it necessary to monitor you for this problem. That is not to say that they do not believe that your symptoms are genuine, but rather that they are happy that the symptoms do not indicate anything worrying or serious. If you experience new symptoms, such as blocked nose, runny nose, impairment of smell, sinus pain, sore throat, change in your voice or difficulty with swallowing, you should inform your doctor about it.

Uncertainties

A great number of uncertainties surround chronic catarrh, ranging from what it is to what causes it and this makes it very difficult for doctors to manage satisfactorily. It is important to take account of this when looking for treatment or cures on the internet – a great of variety of internet sites claim to be able to cure catarrh by various means but with very little evidence to back up these claims. Do remember that if doctors thought these internet treatments worked, then the treatments would almost certainly be available on the NHS.

If you have any problems or questions, please contact:

Please insert local department routine and emergency contact details here

If you would like to know more, visit our website at www.entuk.org

Disclaimer: This publication is designed for the information of patients. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the information contained may not be comprehensive and patients should not act upon it without seeking professional advice.

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www.entuk.org
What is ‘catarrh’?
- Catarrh is a condition that is very common but yet very difficult to describe well. It means different things to different people.
- Some people use the term catarrh to describe a feeling of mucus at the back of their nose.
- Others use it to describe a build up of phlegm in their throat and for some it simply means the continuous desire to clear their throat. Catarrh is not even well defined in the medical textbooks – except to say that the term comes from ancient Greek times and literally means ‘to flow down’.
- What we do know about people who suffer from catarrh is that they experience the sensation most of the time and often for many years. Most people will get a degree of catarrh when they have a cold or flu, but this usually clears away quite quickly. People with chronic or long standing catarrh usually describe the feeling of having a constant cold but without any of the other symptoms of a cold.

Two Types of Catarrh
There appears to be two types of catarrh.
- There are some patients who experience catarrh with an excess of mucus that actually runs out of their nose (known as ‘rhinitis’).
- There are other patients, however, who experience the same sensation of an excess of mucus but are unable to clear anything out of their nose or their throat. This can be frustrating for them.

What causes catarrh?
We don’t know what causes people to experience chronic catarrh. Research suggests that it is not related to allergy, nor is it due to any abnormality of the way mucus is transported within the nose. It is possible that the catarrh may be due more to an abnormality of the feeling in the lining of the back of the nose and the throat. This may explain why so many patients find it difficult to spit out the mucus that they are sensing at the back of the throat.

What are the symptoms of catarrh?
Catarrh is associated with a great number of other symptoms. Apart from the sensation of mucus at the back of the nose or throat, or of a persistent desire to clear the throat, patients may also notice other symptoms. These include:-
- A sensation of nasal congestion,
- ineffective nose blowing,
- throat discomfort,
- crackling or dragging sensation in the ears,
- a sensation of choking or something stuck in the throat,
- a constant cough or of feeling sick.

How is catarrh diagnosed?
There is no diagnostic test for catarrh given that it is not evidently due to an actual disease. When people are said to have catarrh, it is based only on a sensation that they feel. We know from research that tests for allergy, tests of mucus flow and CT x-ray scans of the sinuses are not helpful in the management of people who experience chronic catarrh.

How is catarrh treated?
There are unfortunately no cures for chronic catarrh. It is quite possible that those catarrh sufferers who also have runny nose will benefit from a steroid nasal spray. Those who do not have a runny nose do not usually find such sprays helpful. On the whole, antibiotics do not seem to be helpful.

Simple remedies such as saline nasal rinses, which can be made at home or purchased over the counter at a pharmacist, are reported by some sufferers to give partial relief of their symptoms. These need to be used regularly (3 or 4 times per day) and over a long period of time, for as long as it provides benefit.

Homeopathy practitioners often have an interest in managing catarrh although again there are no reliable studies to say whether or not homeopathy can be proven to work for catarrh.