

BE WELL

Finding Relief from Post-Nasal Drip

By Debbie DeAngelo
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Post-nasal drip. Perhaps no one ever died of it, but it sure is annoying. Whether a persistent tickle, nagging cough, or continuous clearing of the throat, post-nasal drip (PND) can interrupt your day and disrupt your slumber.

PND originates in the sinuses, nose and throat, and is a normal process in which mucus traps inhaled germs, dust, pollen and environmental debris and moves them out of the nasal canal, down the back of the throat, and into the stomach. Central to this mechanism is mucus, which also prevents the airway from drying out.

Although it may be hard to wrap your head around, the average person produces approximately one quart of it daily in the nasal and sinus areas. While everyone

experiences PND, not everyone senses it. Production ramps up if you have allergies or an upper respiratory infection. During these times, the increased mucus can cause a sore throat, coughing, and hoarseness. If you don't have other symptoms of infection or allergies present, then acid reflux should not be ruled out as it can trigger PND and chronic cough too.

Home Remedies

Managing PND begins by identifying the cause and targeting the source. Whether due to allergies, infection or just a sensitivity to the body's normal cleansing system, here are some strategies to help you cope with the effects.

Prop yourself up. If you notice that symptoms worsen while lying down and you cough frequently in this position, then elevate your head six to eight inches with pillows or a wedge. This minimizes the constant tickle and cough by preventing mucus from collecting at the back of the throat.

Humidify the air. Freezing weather and dry air are respiratory irritants, so increasing moisture in the air is essential. Running a humidifier, especially while sleeping, is both a comfort measure and a way of thinning mucus. Be sure to sanitize it weekly so it doesn't become a bacterial breeding ground and ultimately worsen your symptoms.

Moisten your airway. Beyond the soothing action, using a nasal saline spray or Neti pot (device used for nasal irrigation) helps to alleviate thickened secretions and washes away inhaled irritants. Along the same lines, be sure to drink plenty of fluids throughout the day. Steam from warm beverages is particularly beneficial.

Hit the shower. Once again, steam is your friend. Not only does it thin mucus but it opens clogged sinuses as well. Spend a few extra minutes allowing a hot shower to work its magic.

Consider medicine. There are several types of over-the-counter medications to assist in managing PND. They range from nasal steroids to antihistamines to oral decongestants. The best choice may depend upon the reason for your symptoms as well as any other medicines you are taking, so check in with your pharmacist for recommendations.

On a short-term basis, post-nasal drip is relatively easy to manage. If you seem to be plagued with this nuisance year-round, then be sure to speak to your health-care provider about treating the source of the problem.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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