

Wendy Haaf answers your questions about health, nutrition, and well-being



Could postnasal drip be making me queasy—and if so, are there things I can do to ease it?



Without knowing more, it's hard to say whether postnasal drip (phlegm dripping down the back of the throat) is the culprit.

If a daily upset stomach is your only symptom, "I wouldn't go first to postnasal drip as the likely suspect," says Dr. Anne Ellis, a professor of medicine and the chair of the Division of Allergy at Queen's University in Kingston, ON. "It's possible, but I'd look for more common causes of queasiness first, such as gastroesophageal reflux disease [GERD] and peptic ulcer disease." If an unsettled stomach is indeed the sole symptom, it's probably reasonable to see if taking an occasional over-the-counter antacid helps. If not, or if you find yourself needing to use the antacid more than a few times a week, it's advisable to see your doctor.

However, if you have other symptoms of allergy, such as cough, runny or itchy nose, and sinus congestion, "it's something to think about," Ellis says. While cough and the feeling of something dripping down the back of the throat are more common complaints among people with postnasal drip, "I do see cases where what bothers the patient most is that they feel sick to their stomach," she says.

One of the things you could try, particularly if you also have a stuffy nose, is a nasal sinus rinse. "It can be very effective" for reducing congestion, Ellis says. "The key is using a very high volume and doing it often enough. The little nasal spray bottles don't do much. And once or twice a day isn't enough to produce long-lasting relief. You need to do it multiple



times throughout the day—it's safe to do up to six times daily."

You could also see if a non-prescription antihistamine offers any relief. "We have a lot of effective over-the-counter antihistamines that can be beneficial for postnasal drip symptoms," Ellis says. One caveat: Make sure you use only the newer, non-sedating type, since older drugs such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl, for one) "can cause cognitive impairment and lead to delirium in older people."

If these strategies fail and you're still having persistent symptoms, not only should you see your family physician, but it's worth considering asking for a referral to an allergy specialist.

"A lot of people suffer silently with rhinitis symptoms [nasal inflammation]," Ellis says. And if allergies are the cause, as they are with the overwhelming majority of cases, "usually we can implement therapies that make people feel better." ■

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