



Cobblestone Throat: Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment—A Review

Ms. Deborah.B

B.Sc. (N) IV year, Apollo College of Nursing, Chennai, India.

INTRODUCTION

Cobblestone throat is a condition characterized by an irritated throat with visible bumps and lumps at the back, resembling cobblestones. These bumps are typically caused by enlarged lymphatic tissue in the tonsils and adenoids due to inflammation. Despite its alarming appearance, cobblestone throat is often harmless and curable.

EPIDEMIOLOGY

In a systematic review carried out Miller et al. (2022) quantified the global burden of sore throat and Strep A sore throat among 12 and 14 studies respectively. In those studies, the incidence of Streptococcus sore throat and children with sore throats, who were primarily children between the ages of 5 and 14, encountered 22.1 occurrences per 100 child years. DeWyer (2020) conducted a study related to the incidence of sore throat in a school in Uganda that identified 1290.2 per 100 population. A prospective study in India conducted by Parthasarathy (2020) among less than aged 10-year household children revealed the incidence of sore throat is 19.2 per 100 population. These studies emphasize the importance of community surveillance in determining the increasing incidence of Strep A and sore throat diseases.

CAUSES

The primary cause of cobblestone throat is irritation from postnasal drip, which is excess mucus dripping down the back of the throat. This can be triggered by various factors such as seasonal allergies, colds, dry air, smoking or vaping, certain medications, laryngopharyngeal reflux (LPR), and other upper respiratory infections.

SYMPTOMS

Individuals with cobblestone throat may experience a range of symptoms, including persistent dry cough, hoarseness, nausea, bad breath, stuffiness, fever, pain while talking or swallowing, a scratchy throat, and a sensation of something being stuck in the throat.

CANCER CONCERNS

Many people worry about cancer when they notice lumps and bumps in their body. However, cobblestone throat is not considered an indication of any type of cancer.

TREATMENT

Treatment for cobblestone throat typically involves addressing the mucus-producing condition causing it. This may include over-the-counter decongestants for allergies or infections, steroid nasal sprays, and



antibiotics for bacterial infections. Lifestyle modifications may be necessary if cobblestone throat is linked to LPR, such as weight loss, quitting smoking, limiting alcohol, and avoiding acidic foods.

HOME REMEDIES AND PREVENTION

Several home remedies can help alleviate the symptoms of cobblestone throat, including drinking warm fluids, gargling salt water, using lozenges, placing a humidifier in the room, and taking honey with ginger. To prevent cobblestone throat, it's recommended to avoid allergy triggers, practice good hygiene, avoid contact with sick individuals, and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION

While cobblestone throat is usually not serious, medical attention should be sought if symptoms worsen over several days, do not improve with home treatment, or if the pain is severe.

THE MEDICAL MANAGEMENT

1. **Allergies:** If allergies are the cause, antihistamines may be prescribed to reduce inflammation and relieve symptoms. Nasal corticosteroid sprays can also help alleviate nasal congestion and postnasal drip, which contributes to the cobblestone appearance.
2. **Sinusitis:** For sinus infections, antibiotics may be prescribed if the infection is bacterial. Decongestants or nasal saline irrigation can help relieve sinus congestion and reduce postnasal drip.
3. **Reflux:** If acid reflux is contributing to the cobblestone throat, proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) or H2 blockers may be prescribed to reduce stomach acid production and prevent irritation of the throat.
4. **Viral Infections:** If the cobblestone throat is caused by a viral infection, treatment focuses on managing symptoms with rest, hydration, and over-the-counter pain relievers like acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
5. **Hydration:** Regardless of the cause, staying hydrated is important to keep the throat moist and soothe irritation. Drinking plenty of fluids, particularly warm liquids like tea or broth, can help.
6. **Avoiding Irritants:** Patients should avoid irritants such as cigarette smoke, environmental pollutants, and dry air, as these can exacerbate throat irritation and inflammation.
7. **Follow-Up:** It's essential for patients to follow up with their healthcare provider to monitor their progress and ensure appropriate management of their condition. In some cases, further investigation or adjustments to treatment may be necessary.

SURGICAL MANAGEMENT

Surgical management of cobblestone throat is not typically the first-line approach and is usually reserved for specific cases where conservative treatments have failed or when there's an underlying structural issue that needs correction. However, if surgery is deemed necessary, the procedures might include:

1. **Tonsillectomy:** Removal of the tonsils may be indicated if they are enlarged or chronically infected, contributing to the cobblestone appearance in the throat.



2. **Adenoidectomy:** Removal of the adenoids, which are located in the back of the nasal cavity, may be necessary if they are chronically inflamed or obstructing the airway, leading to postnasal drip and throat irritation.
3. **Sinus Surgery:** In cases of chronic sinusitis or structural abnormalities in the sinuses contributing to postnasal drip and throat irritation, surgical procedures such as endoscopic sinus surgery may be performed to improve sinus drainage and alleviate symptoms.
4. **Reflux Surgery:** For patients with severe gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) that does not respond to medical management, surgical procedures like fundoplication may be considered to strengthen the lower esophageal sphincter and prevent acid reflux.
5. **Biopsy:** In rare cases where there are concerns about underlying malignancy or other serious conditions, a biopsy of the throat tissue may be performed surgically to obtain a definitive diagnosis.

It's important to note that surgical management is typically considered after thorough evaluation by healthcare providers and when conservative treatments have been ineffective or inappropriate for the specific case. The decision to undergo surgery should be made in consultation with a healthcare provider who can assess the individual patient's needs and risks.

NURSING MANAGEMENT

1. **Assessment:** Nurses assess the patient's symptoms, including throat discomfort, difficulty swallowing, and any associated symptoms like nasal congestion or postnasal drip.
2. **Patient Education:** Nurses educate patients about the condition, its possible causes, and management strategies. This includes explaining the importance of hydration, avoiding irritants, and adhering to prescribed medications.
3. **Comfort Measures:** Nurses provide comfort measures to alleviate throat discomfort, such as offering throat lozenges, warm saline gargles, or cold beverages.
4. **Medication Administration:** Nurses administer prescribed medications, such as antihistamines, decongestants, or proton pump inhibitors, as directed by the healthcare provider.
5. **Monitoring:** Nurses monitor the patient's response to treatment, noting any changes in symptoms or adverse reactions to medications.
6. **Documentation:** Nurses document their assessments, interventions, and the patient's response to treatment in the medical record, ensuring accurate and comprehensive communication among healthcare team members.
7. **Support:** Nurses provide emotional support to patients experiencing discomfort or anxiety related to their condition. They address patient concerns and encourage adherence to treatment plans.
8. **Collaboration:** Nurses collaborate with other members of the healthcare team, including physicians, pharmacists, and respiratory therapists, to ensure coordinated care and optimal patient outcomes.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, cobblestone throat, characterized by a bumpy, irritated throat, is typically a benign condition caused by factors such as postnasal drip from allergies, infections, or reflux. Despite its alarming appearance, it rarely indicates cancer. Treatment focuses on addressing the underlying cause, with options ranging from medication to lifestyle adjustments. Nurses play a vital role in patient care, providing education, comfort measures, and monitoring. Surgical intervention is considered when conservative measures fail, with procedures like tonsillectomy or adenoidectomy being potential options. Ultimately, management should be tailored to each patient's specific needs, with healthcare providers guiding decisions to ensure the best possible outcomes.

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