

Swollen uvula (little thing that hangs in the back of your throat) ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I am a 25 year old male and I have a swollen and lengthy uvula (the little thing that hangs in the back of your throat). What could it be? Thanks.

Answer

Dear Reader,

The uvula (also known as "the little dangly-bit in the back of your throat") is made of muscle and connective tissue and is covered with the same mucous membrane that lines the inside of your cheeks and the roof of your mouth. Much like your finger prints, different people have different uvulas — some are naturally longer than others. While potentially annoying, a naturally lengthy uvula is generally harmless. However, many things can cause it to swell and lengthen including infections, injury, or your environment. The uvula can be inflamed on its own or other parts of the throat and mouth area can be inflamed as well. For example, tonsillitis is inflammation of the tonsils and can also cause inflammation of the uvula. What else can cause your uvula to grow? The usual suspects include:

- **Mechanical trauma:** If you've recently undergone a procedure that involved an endoscope (a medical device with a light that can go down your throat to look into a body cavity or organ) or had general anesthesia, the devices that went into your throat can damage the uvula and lead to inflammation and soreness. Also, coughing or even snoring ^[2] can cause uvula irritation.
- **Chemical or thermal injury:** Inhaling irritants, smoke, or other substances that are smoked or nasally inhaled (such as marijuana, cocaine, and tobacco smoke) can cause uvula inflammation. Furthermore, the temperature of inhaled substance can be a factor — for instance, cannabis burns at higher temperatures than tobacco, and therefore can be more irritating to the mucous membranes.
- **Bacterial or viral infections:** Infections including strep throat, the flu virus, and thrush ^[3] are a few culprits implicated in causing uvular swelling.
- **Allergies:** Seasonal allergies can cause post-nasal drip which can be irritating and food

sensitivities might also cause some inflammation.

- **Other:** A few other potential causes include exposure to dry heat and air, dehydration, and ulcers.

You might be wondering if there are any complications from having an enlarged uvula. Have you noticed any changes in your voice or the making of certain sounds? Because the uvula is believed to have a role in helping make a number of sounds, you might experience some differences (albeit minor) from swelling. What about your sleep? Is your slumber disrupted due to difficulty breathing? A swollen uvula can be associated with snoring and [sleep apnea](#) [4]. Folks with a swollen uvula may also experience nasal or sinus congestion, feeling like a foreign body is in their throat, or a gagging or coughing reflex (especially when lying down). In serious cases, the swelling could obstruct the airway and impede breathing, swallowing, or speaking. If you're experiencing any of these, it's recommended that you seek medical attention as soon as possible.

If you continue to have problems, you may want to meet with your health care provider. There are several options that they may be able to suggest that can assist you, including having it shortened. Uvular shortening can be an in-office procedure with topical and local anesthesia, and the procedure has been found to improve certain cases of inflamed, injured, or extraneous uvula tissue. Other treatments depend on the cause of the enlarged uvula, but might involve antihistamines, steroid hormones, or antibiotics.

Best of luck to you with identifying causes and finding solutions to your unique uvular experience.

Alice!

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Published date:

Jan 26, 2001

Last reviewed on:

Aug 26, 2016

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