

Patient Information

Retrograde Cricopharyngeal Dysfunction (R-CPD)

Also known as “inability to burp syndrome”

What is Retrograde Cricopharyngeal Dysfunction (R-CPD)?

Retrograde Cricopharyngeal Dysfunction (R-CPD) is a condition in which a person is **unable to burp**. This happens because a muscle in the upper throat, called the **cricopharyngeus muscle**, fails to relax when it should — preventing the release of air from the stomach through the throat (retrograde air release).

This can cause uncomfortable symptoms and impact quality of life.

What Are the Symptoms?

People with R-CPD may experience:

- **Inability to burp**
- **Excessive bloating**, especially after eating or drinking
- **Gurgling or rumbling sounds** in the throat or chest
- **Chest or abdominal pressure**
- **Pain or discomfort in the neck, chest, or upper stomach**
- **Frequent hiccups or nausea**
- Relief from symptoms when lying down or by releasing air through the other end of the digestive tract (flatulence)

What Causes R-CPD?

R-CPD is believed to be caused by a **failure of the cricopharyngeus muscle** (part of the upper oesophageal sphincter) to relax when needed to allow gas to escape from the oesophagus upward.

The exact reason why this happens is not always known. It is not typically linked to structural abnormalities or diseases.

How is R-CPD Diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based mainly on your **symptoms and history**. Many patients have lived with symptoms for years before receiving a diagnosis.

Your ENT specialist or speech therapist may perform tests to rule out other causes, which may include:

- **Flexible nasendoscopy** – to examine the throat and voice box

- **Swallowing studies** (e.g. videofluoroscopy)
- **Manometry** – to measure pressure and muscle function in the throat and oesophagus
- **CT scan or MRI** – rarely needed, unless there are unusual symptoms

How is R-CPD Treated?

The most effective treatment currently available is:

Botulinum Toxin (BoNT-A) Injection into the Cricopharyngeus Muscle

- A small dose of **botulinum toxin** is injected directly into the cricopharyngeus muscle in the neck.
- This **relaxes the muscle**, allowing it to open and release trapped air (burping).
- The injection may be performed in a clinic setting, guided by **electromyography (EMG)**.
- **Most patients burp for the first time within a few days** after the injection.

In many cases, the effect **lasts long after the botulinum toxin wears off**, and patients retain the ability to burp long-term after just one injection.

Please note that this treatment for R-CPD is not currently funded on the NHS.

What Are the Risks of Treatment?

Botulinum toxin injection is generally safe. Potential side effects may include:

- **Temporary difficulty swallowing**
- **Mild neck discomfort or bruising**
- Rarely, **voice changes** or **reflux symptoms**

Your doctor will explain the procedure, answer your questions, and assess if it is suitable for you.

Will I Need More Than One Treatment?

Many patients need only **one injection** to achieve long-term improvement. However, a small number may need a **repeat injection** if symptoms return.

When Should I See a Specialist?

You should see a specialist if you have:

- Ongoing **inability to burp**
- Unexplained **bloating, discomfort**, or **gurgling**
- Symptoms that affect your **quality of life** or cause embarrassment

Self-Help and Tips

While waiting for treatment:

- Avoid **carbonated drinks** if they worsen symptoms
- Eat smaller meals
- Avoid lying flat after eating
- Gentle movement (like walking) may help shift gas

Summary

- R-CPD is a real condition that causes an **inability to burp** and symptoms like bloating, chest pressure, and gurgling.
- It is caused by a failure of a muscle in the throat to relax properly.
- **Botulinum injection** is a highly effective treatment, often providing lasting relief.
- Diagnosis is based on your symptoms, and treatment is available through a specialist ENT clinic.

If you think you may have R-CPD, speak to your GP or ENT specialist. Effective treatment is available — and you don't have to live with the discomfort.