

Sore Throat (Pharyngitis)

What is a sore throat?

Sore throats range from a mere scratch to pain so severe that even swallowing saliva hurts. They can be caused by heavy cigarette smoking and infections of the throat, tonsils, or nasal passages from a virus, fungus, or bacteria such as streptococcus, the one that causes strep throat.

If an infection is the cause, your doctor may take a throat culture.

If streptococcus or any other type of bacteria is the culprit, he or she will prescribe an antibiotic. Be sure you take all of the antibiotic. If strep throat is left untreated, serious complications, including rheumatic heart disease or abscesses, could arise. An antifungal medicine is used to treat a fungal infection.

What is the treatment?

Viral sore throats may last 3-10 days. Antibiotics will not help cure this type of sore throat and may even cause unwanted side effects.

Strep throat symptoms may develop 2 to 5 days after exposure. Strep throat usually lasts 3-7 days. Treating a strep throat with antibiotics decreases the length of the illness by one or two days and can prevent rare complications. You are no longer contagious and can return to work or school after taking antibiotics for 24 hours.

How can I take care of myself?

- Gargle every few hours with a solution of 1/4 teaspoon of salt dissolved in 1/2 cup of warm water.

- Drink plenty of warm beverages, such as tea with lemon (with or without honey) and soup.
- For strep throat, eat and drink cold foods and liquids such as frozen yogurt, popsicles, and ice water.
- If you get a sore throat often consider adding an electronic air filter and humidifier to your furnace system.
- Don't smoke.
- Avoid eating spicy or acidic foods.
- Suck on a piece of hard candy or medicated lozenge every so often. (Do not give to children under age 5.)
- Take an over-the-counter medicine for the pain and/or fever.
- Do not get in close contact with anyone you know who has a sore throat.

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Patient Education Handout associated with UMHS Clinical Care Guideline

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