



## Sore Throat

Uncomfortable though it can be, a sore throat usually signifies nothing more than a viral illness, i.e., cold or flu. Somewhere from 70-90 percent of sore throats are caused by viruses and therefore untreatable with antibiotics. However, some sore throat infections are caused by a bacterium called streptococcus, usually referred to as “strep throat.” If untreated, this infection can lead to heart (rheumatic fever) or kidney disease (nephritis).

### **What to Do At Home**

The goal is to make you more comfortable until the infection passes.

- Take two acetaminophen, (Tylenol®, etc.) or ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, etc.) every 4 hours for fever or pain. For children and teenagers only, acetaminophen or ibuprofen is recommended, as aspirin has been associated with Reye Syndrome.
- Try nonprescription soothing throat lozenges or sprays or honey and lemon.
- Some find relief by gargling with warm salt water; a half teaspoon of table salt in a half glass of warm water. On the other hand, frequent sips of ice water or other ice cold fluids can also be very soothing.
- Get extra rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- Take your temperature if you feel feverish. If you have a fever, it probably is best to stay home from school or work for a day or two.

### **When to Call the Doctor**

First of all, the degree of soreness is not related to the severity of the illness. Some viral infections can be exquisitely painful, while some strep infections have more headache or abdominal pains than much of a sore throat. Call your doctor when:

- the sore throat is associated with fever of greater than 101 degrees, especially if there's no runny or stuffy nose or cough. A sore throat associated with a runny or stuffy nose or cough is less likely to be strep.
- the sore throat interferes with talking, breathing, swallowing or ability to open jaws.
- mild sore throat lasts several days or recurs several times.
- you see pus or grayish membrane at the back of the throat, on the tonsils.
- the sore throat is accompanied by very tender and swollen glands along the front of the neck.
- a fine red rash accompanies the sore throat.

**Note:** You have at least 10-12 days from the onset of sore throat to treat with antibiotics to prevent rheumatic fever.

### **If You Visit the Doctor**

If strep disease is considered possible, your health care provider may do a rapid strep test. This is a sampling of the secretions from the throat to see if the strep germ is growing there. With a rapid strep test, certain parts of the germ react with chemicals in the test; the results are available immediately. The rapid strep test is convenient and also the most accurate strep test now available.

If the test is negative, no antibiotics are needed because the illness is caused by a virus. If the test is positive, you must be on antibiotics for the full course (usually 10 days) to prevent the complications of strep throat listed above. You are no longer contagious for strep 24 hours after the start of antibiotics.

