

Soothing Your Sore Throat

Developed by the American Pharmacists Association. Improving medication use. Advancing patient care.

Do you have a sore throat? Well, you're certainly not alone. Sore throats are common for both adults and children.

Know the Facts

Some sore throats are caused by irritation. Smoking, loud talking or yelling, drinking alcohol, or breathing air that is too dry and too cold (or hot) can make your throat sore. If you have allergies, your throat often may be painful.

But most sore throats are caused by an infection. The back of your throat is warm and wet. It's the perfect spot to grow viruses and bacteria. Viruses cause about 85% to 90% of all infectious sore throats, while bacteria cause the remaining 10% to 15% of infectious sore throats. One type of bacterial infection in the throat is called "strep throat." Your doctor can swab your throat to find out if you have strep and can prescribe medicine—an antibiotic—to treat it. How can you decide if your sore throat might be strep?

Here are some clues.

How you feel?	Is it most likely a virus?	Could it be strep throat?
Your sore throat came on fast, and you had no other symptoms.		•
You have a runny nose or stuffy head.	•	
You have a headache.	•	
You are dizzy.	•	
You have a fever of 101°F or more.	•	•
You are coughing.	•	•
Your voice sounds hoarse.	•	
You are feeling better in 3 to 5 days.	•	

Caring for Your Sore Throat

Although antibiotic medications work magic on strep throats, they do nothing for sore throats that come from viruses or general irritations. But there are things you can do to feel better. Here are some tips:

- Drink more. Water, fruit juices, and caffeine-free liquids are best. Some people find warm drinks—such as a cup of herbal tea with a spoonful of honey added—most soothing. Try to drink 8 to 12 ounces of liquid every hour.
- Keep your throat moist. Suck on medicated throat lozenges, ice chips, or frozen fruit bars. Look for lozenges that have menthol or benzocaine, because these types of lozenges also will relieve pain.
- Keep the air around you moist. Use a cool-mist humidifier or a vaporizer in your bedroom. Try standing in a hot, steamy shower.
- Gargle. Every 3 or 4 hours, gargle with a mild mouthwash or warm salt water (mix 1/2 teaspoon of salt in 1 cup of water). Do not swallow the mouthwash or salt water. Never gargle with aspirin dissolved in water.
- Use pain relievers. Take an over-the-counter pain medicine such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen. Because of the risk of Reye's syndrome, never give aspirin to children and teenagers. Try an analgesic (pain-relieving) throat spray that contains dyclonine hydrochloride.
- Be good to yourself. Get plenty of rest. Eat a balanced, healthy diet. Avoid speaking. Press a warm, wet washcloth against your neck, or use a heating pad set on "warm".

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Should You Go to the Doctor?

See your health care professional if you have any of these problems:

You begin to have new problems in your throat such as:

- Trouble swallowing (or a lot of drooling in a young child).
- Trouble breathing.
- Tender or swollen glands or enlarged tonsils.
- Pus in the back of your throat or white patches on your throat or tonsils.
- Coughing up green, brown, or bloody mucus.
- Hoarseness that lasts more than a week.

You feel worse.

- Your sore throat seems very bad or gets worse quickly.
- Your sore throat lasts for more than 3 days without getting better.
- You have a temperature of 101°F or greater.

You notice other health problems such as:

- Earache.
- Joint pains.
- A red rash along with a fever.
- Redness in the folds of your skin.

You have reasons to worry about getting a strep infection.

- Your sore throat started after you were around someone who had strep throat.
- You have had rheumatic fever or rheumatic heart disease in the past.
- You have a heart murmur.
- You often have a sore throat.

Keep Your Throat Healthy—and Keep That Infection to Yourself

To keep yourself healthy and to protect others, follow these tips:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Don't share eating utensils or drinks.
- Cover your mouth when you sneeze or cough.

And to protect your throat from irritation:

- Don't smoke.
- Avoid breathing in anything that might irritate your throat.
- Drink six to eight glasses of water a day.
- Breathe through your nose.
- Keep the air in your home moist and not too hot in the winter.
- Keep your allergies under control.
- Avoid or limit drinking alcohol.
- Avoid yelling.

For More Information

To read more about sore throats, visit these Web sites:

- www.cepacol.com
- www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003053.htm