

## Sore Throat

A sore throat normally goes away after a few days. Treatment can ease the symptoms. See a doctor if symptoms are severe or persist.

**Sore throat (pharyngitis)** is very common. It is usually caused by a virus infection. Soreness in the throat may be the only symptom. In addition, you may also have a hoarse voice, mild cough, fever, and headache, feel sick, feel tired, and the glands in your neck may swell. It may be painful to swallow. Symptoms typically get worse over 2-3 days and then gradually go, usually within a week. You may also develop a sore throat if you have a cold or flu-like illness.

**Tonsillitis** is an infection of the tonsils at the back of the mouth. Symptoms are similar to a sore throat, but may be more severe. In particular, fever and generally feeling unwell tend to be worse. You may have some pus on the enlarged red tonsils.

### What is the treatment for sore throat and tonsillitis?

- **Not treating** is an option as many throat infections are mild and soon get better.
- **Have plenty to drink.** It is tempting not to drink much if swallowing is painful. This may lead to mild dehydration, particularly if you also have a fever. Mild dehydration can make headaches and tiredness much worse.
- **Tylenol or ibuprofen** ease pain, headache, and fever. A regular full dose is better than 'now and then' to ease pain until symptoms go. Tylenol is also available as soluble tablets and in liquid form for children.
- **Aspirin gargles** may ease the soreness. (There is little research evidence to confirm that this is effective. However, it is a popular treatment and may be worth a try.) Dissolve some soluble aspirin in water and gargle for 3-4 minutes. You can do this 3-4 times a day. Spit out the aspirin after gargling. (You should not give aspirin to children under 16.)
- **Other gargles, lozenges, and sprays** that you can buy at pharmacies may help to soothe a sore throat. However, they do not shorten the illness. They tend to be expensive, and may do little extra to ease symptoms than the above measures.

### Do I need an antibiotic?

Usually not. Viruses cause most throat and tonsil infections although some are caused by

bacteria. It is usually not possible to tell if it is a viral or bacterial infection. Antibiotics kill bacteria, but do not kill viruses. However, an antibiotic is not thought to make much difference even if a bacterium is the cause. The body's immune system normally fights off these infections quickly whether caused by viruses or bacteria. Antibiotics can sometimes cause side effects such as diarrhea, rash, and stomach upsets.

An antibiotic may be advised if the infection is severe, if it is not easing after a few days, or if your immune system is not working properly (for example, if you have had your spleen removed or if you are on chemotherapy, etc).

Occasionally a throat or tonsil infection is due to an uncommon cause, such as glandular fever. See a doctor if symptoms are severe, or if they do not ease within 3-4 days.