

Soothing A SORE THROAT

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR THROAT HURTS

We've all had sore throats around this time of year. Your throat feels scratchy and may hurt when you swallow. What can you do to soothe a sore throat? And when is it a sign of a more serious infection?

Most sore throats are caused by viral infections such as the common cold or the flu. These throat problems are generally minor and go away on their own.

To soothe your irritated throat, keep it moist. Ever notice that a sore throat seems worse in the morning? It's because your throat gets so dry overnight. Having lozenges or hard candies—or anything that stimulates saliva production—will keep your throat moist. It's also important to drink plenty of fluids.

For young children who might choke on hard candies or lozenges, try cold liquids and popsicles. Throat pain might also be soothed by throat sprays and over-the-counter pain relievers such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen or aspirin, but don't give aspirin to young children.

When Should You See A Doctor?

Contact a doctor if your sore throat is severe, doesn't feel better after a few days, or is accompanied by a high fever or swollen glands. These symptoms could be signs of a bacterial infection, such as strep throat. Taking antibiotics won't help at all if your sore throat is caused by viruses, but they're essential for fighting bacterial infections like strep.

Strep is the most common bacterial throat infection. Although it can occur in adults, strep throat is more common in children between ages five and 15. Strep can be harder to detect in younger children, because it can cause a runny nose and other symptoms that make it seem like a cold. If your child has severe throat pain, a fever above 100.4 degrees, or swollen glands, you should get medical attention right away. Children with strep also may experience nausea, vomiting and stomach pain.



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To see whether you have strep throat, the doctor will take a throat swab. If test results confirm strep, your doctor will prescribe antibiotics. After 24 hours of taking them, you should no longer be contagious. You'll likely begin feeling better within a couple of days, but to fully recover it's important to finish all of the medicine.

Strep is highly contagious. Treat it quickly to prevent it from spreading to others. Not only can the infection be transmitted, but there are potential complications from untreated strep throat. These include ear infections, rheumatic fever and kidney problems.

Another fairly common throat infection is tonsillitis, which occurs when you have sore, swollen tonsils. It's caused by many of the same viruses and bacteria that cause sore throats. If you have frequent bouts of tonsillitis or strep throat, you may need surgery (called a tonsillectomy) to have your tonsils removed.

The best way to protect yourself from the germs that cause these infections is to wash your hands often. Try to steer clear of people who have colds or other contagious infections. And avoid smoking and inhaling second-hand smoke, which can irritate your throat.

SORE THROAT RELIEF

- Try hot tea with lemon or some hot soup.
- Keep your throat moist with lozenges or hard candies.
- Gargle with warm salt water or use ice chips.
- Cold liquids or popsicles can numb the pain. Throat sprays and over-the-counter pain relievers can help, too.
- Use a humidifier or vaporizer, especially when sleeping, to keep air from getting too dry.
- If the sore throat persists for several days, contact a health care professional.

