



Sore Throat

Sore throat (pharyngitis) is very common. It is usually due to a virus infection. Soreness in the throat may be the only symptom. In addition, one or more of the following symptoms may occur. A hoarse voice, a mild cough, a raised temperature (fever), headache and feeling tired. The glands in the neck may swell (they are fighting off the virus). Swallowing may be painful. A sore throat may also develop with a cold or 'flu like illness. A sore throat typically becomes worse over 2-3 days and then eases and goes, usually within a week.

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, any fever and general feeling of being unwell tend to be worse. The glands in the neck commonly enlarge. Pus can often be seen on the enlarged red tonsils. Glandular fever is a possibility if tonsillitis is severe or prolonged.

Treatment of sore throat and tonsillitis

- ◆ *No treatment* is an option as many sore throats are mild and soon go away.
- ◆ *Drink plenty of fluids* - it is tempting not to drink much if swallowing is painful. This may lead to mild dehydration, particularly if there is also a fever. Mild dehydration can make headaches and tiredness much worse.
- ◆ *Aspirin gargles* may ease the soreness. Dissolve some aspirin in water and gargle for 3-4 minutes. This can be done 3-4 times a day. This is often most useful before meals and at bedtime. The aspirin can then be swallowed for further relief of any pain, headache or fever. (Aspirin should not be given to children under 12).
- ◆ *Paracetamol* is an alternative to ease pain, headache and fever. It can be given to children as a medicine (such as Calpol, Disprol etc). Paracetamol is also available as dissolvable tablets. Some people prefer to gargle with aspirin as the local effect on the throat may be better than paracetamol. They then spit it out and take paracetamol for general relief of pain and fever. This is because aspirin may cause an upset stomach.

Do I need an antibiotic?

Usually not. Most infections causing a sore throat or tonsillitis are due to virus germs. Antibiotics kill bacteria but do not kill viruses. Some throat and tonsil infections are due to bacteria. However, an antibiotic is not thought to make much difference even if bacteria cause the throat or tonsil infection. The body normally fights off throat and tonsil infections quickly whether due to a virus or bacteria. Antibiotics can sometimes cause side effects such as diarrhoea, rash and stomach upsets. An antibiotic may be advised if the infection is particularly severe, if it is not easing after a few days or if the immune system is not working properly (such as people without a spleen, people on chemotherapy etc).

Occasionally a throat or tonsil infection is due to a rare cause. Consult a doctor if:

- ◆ symptoms are severe or are unusual and different to those described above;
- ◆ symptoms are not beginning to settle within 3-4 days.

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