



Strep Throat (Pharyngitis)

About Your Diagnosis

Pharyngitis is an inflammation of the throat commonly caused by viral infections (colds), and less commonly by bacterial infections (“strep” throat, tonsillitis). Strep throat is much less common in adults than in children, and less contagious than many people think.

Bacteria may be contagious or already living on your body and commonly infect the throat, sinuses, and lungs. Sometimes bacterial infections develop after a viral illness, as your body has less ability to fight back since it has already been ill for a while. There is no association with cold weather or getting wet. You may be more susceptible to infections during times of excessive fatigue or stress.

About Your Symptoms

Sore throat, fever, chills, and difficulty swallowing are primary symptoms. Other symptoms may include poor appetite, coughing, fatigue, and body aches. Lymph nodes in the neck may enlarge and become tender. Ear and sinus pain may also occur.

Treatment

Bacterial infections may have serious complications and need to be evaluated by a doctor.

Bacterial pharyngitis (strep throat, tonsillitis) requires antibiotics and sometimes other prescription medications. A throat culture or a rapid strep test may be needed. The recommendations below may help you feel better, even if not completely better after a week.

- ◆ **Pain relievers** like acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) may be taken for pain and fever. Aspirin should not be used in children 18 years and under because of an increased risk of Reye’s syndrome. People who are pregnant or taking warfarin (Coumadin) should take only acetaminophen (Tylenol), unless directed otherwise by their doctor. Acetaminophen should be avoided in people with liver disease or if you consume more than 3 alcoholic drinks a day.
- ◆ **Decongestants** may help nasal congestion and drainage. When taken by mouth these may make you feel jittery or keep you awake if taken near bedtime (pseudoephedrine, Sudafed). They are also available in nasal sprays like Afrin or 4-Way (oxymetolazone or phenylephrine). Decongestant nasal sprays may make nasal congestion worse if used for more than 2 to 3 days. Do not use any form of decongestants without your doctor’s permission if you have high blood pressure, glaucoma, or heart problems.
- ◆ **Antihistamines** like diphenhydramine (Benadryl) are less effective for congestion and drainage but may be helpful for sneezing. As antihistamines can cause drowsiness they may help you get a better night’s sleep. They should not be used in people with an enlarged prostate.
- ◆ **Cough syrups** (Robitussin or Robitussin DM) can help if a cough is causing you soreness or keeping you up at night. Cough syrups with cough suppressants such as dextromethorphan (“DM” after the name) may allow you more rest. Expectorants like guaifenesin (the main ingredient in most cough syrups) stimulate the flow of mucus in dry, hacking coughs. Diabetics should avoid sugar-containing syrups. People with alcohol problems should avoid cough syrups with alcohol. A prescription cough syrup may be necessary, but these can be potentially addicting.
- ◆ **Antibiotics** are prescribed for bacterial infections. Take prescribed antibiotics until they are all finished, otherwise bacteria are likely to become resistant to the antibiotics. Antibiotics can make birth control pills ineffective — alternate means of birth control must be used for the entire month. Ask your doctor about interactions with other prescription medications like Coumadin or seizure medications.

(continued)

The DOs

- ◆ ***Take prescribed antibiotics until they are all finished.***
- ◆ Get lots of rest and extra sleep.
- ◆ Drink up to 2 quarts of liquids a day to avoid dehydration (less if you are on a fluid restriction, for example kidney disease or congestive heart failure).
- ◆ Follow a liquid diet if swallowing is difficult (soups, juices, Jell-O and ice cream).
- ◆ A cool mist vaporizer may help relieve nose and throat irritation. Clean the vaporizer and change the water daily according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- ◆ Warm salt water gargles used hourly can help relieve a sore throat (1/2 teaspoon salt in 1 cup warm water).
- ◆ Lozenges or hard candy may also be soothing (sugar-free candy for diabetics).
- ◆ If coughing, avoid dusty or smoke-filled areas.
- ◆ Always read the labels and ingredients of all over-the-counter and prescription medications to make sure you do not have allergies, contraindications, or a history of adverse reactions to them.

The DON'Ts

- ◆ ***Don't take anyone else's antibiotics or other prescription medications.***
- ◆ Don't skip or double up on doses of antibiotics.
- ◆ Don't smoke — it will further irritate your airways and make coughing worse.
- ◆ Don't drink alcohol — it may interact with medications, mask symptoms, and cause dehydration.
- ◆ Don't use mouthwashes as they may be more irritating.

When to Call Your Doctor

- ◆ If fever of 101° or higher lasts longer than a day.
- ◆ If side effects from antibiotics occur, for example lip or throat swelling, trouble breathing, rash or hives, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, confusion, or any other problems.
- ◆ If a cough develops that brings up thick, yellow/green, bloody or dark sputum.
- ◆ Bad face or head pain with green/yellow drainage from the nose.
- ◆ Throbbing pain or decreased hearing in an ear.
- ◆ If a rash develops.
- ◆ If a severe headache occurs.
- ◆ If there is increased difficulty swallowing.
- ◆ If there is dizziness or lightheadedness.
- ◆ Difficulty breathing either because of wheezing, throat swelling, or a sense that there is fluid in your lungs.
- ◆ A prolonged sore throat that does not improve in 1 to 2 days.
- ◆ Extended loss of appetite or fluid intake (2 days or more) leading to dehydration.

Compliments of LCM Affiliated Physicians

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