
What Causes A Sore Throat?



A sore throat can have many causes. Infections cause the majority of sore throats, and these are the sore throats that are contagious (can be passed from one person to another). Infections are caused by either viruses (such as the 'flu', the 'common cold' or mononucleosis) or bacteria (such as 'strep', mycoplasma or hemophilus). ***The most important difference between viruses and bacteria is that bacteria respond well to antibiotic treatment, but viruses do not.***

VIRUSES: Most viral sore throats accompany the 'flu' or a 'cold'. When a stuffy-runny nose, sneezing, and generalized aches and pains accompany the sore throat, it is probably caused by one of the hundreds of known viruses. These are highly contagious. The body cures itself of a viral infection by building antibodies that destroy the virus, a process that takes about a week. Sore throats may accompany other viral infections such as chicken pox. Canker sores and fever blisters in the throat also can be very painful.

Strep Throat



'Strep throat' is an infection caused by a particular strain of streptococcus bacteria. Your health care provider may recommend a throat culture if your sore throat is not associated with cold symptoms or if it is associated with a fever, swollen glands (lymph nodes in the front of your neck), or white patches on the back of your throat. **A throat culture will test positive if you have strep.**

There are two types of throat cultures that may be done. A *Quick Strep* test can be done immediately with results obtained within 10 minutes. Another type of throat culture that may be ordered is sent to the laboratory. This culture takes 2-3 days to obtain the results. You will be notified by a nurse **ONLY** if your throat culture test is positive.

Strep throat is generally treated with penicillin or another antibiotic. When an antibiotic is prescribed, it should be taken - as the physician directs - for the full course (usually 10 days). Otherwise the infection will probably be suppressed rather than eliminated and it can return. A strep infection can cause damage to the heart valves (rheumatic fever) and kidneys (nephritis). Streptococcal infections can also cause scarlet fever, tonsillitis, pneumonia, sinusitis and ear infections.

When You Should Seek Medical Care

If you have:

- * been in contact with someone with strep throat, it is reasonable to have a throat culture done.
- * Severe and prolonged sore throat lasting longer than a week that is not associated with an allergy or irritation.
- * Difficulty breathing.
- * Difficulty swallowing liquids.
- * Difficulty opening your mouth.
- * Joint pains
- * Earache
- * Rash
- * Fever over 101° F.
- * Blood in saliva or phlegm
- * Frequently recurring sore throat
- * Lump in the neck
- * Hoarseness lasting over 2 weeks.

OTHER CAUSES OF SORE THROATS

- * **Allergies** - The same pollen and molds that irritate the nose when they are inhaled may also irritate the throat.
- * **Sinus or post nasal drainage** often flows down the back of the pharynx, irritating the throat.
- * **Irritation:** Dry heat or air, especially during the winter months, may create a recurring, mild sore throat with a parched feeling.
- * **Breathing through the mouth especially at night** may cause a dry throat.
- * **An occasional cause** of morning sore throat is regurgitation of stomach acids up into the back of the throat where they are extremely irritating.
- * **Tobacco** - The most common and pervasive air pollutant is tobacco smoke.
- * **Straining your voice** - i.e. A person who strains his voice, yelling at a sporting event gets a sore throat not only from the muscle strain, but also from the rough treatment of his throat membranes.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Practice good sanitary habits
2. Avoid close physical contact and sharing of napkins, towels, and utensils with infected persons.
3. Wash your hands frequently.
4. Buy a new toothbrush.

TREATING YOUR SORE THROAT



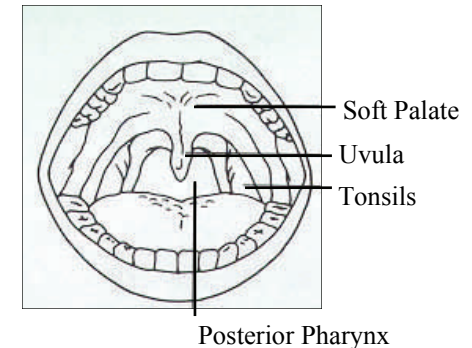
- **Increase your liquid intake.** Warm broth and soup are very good for sore throats. Drink more water and juices. Warm tea with honey is a favorite home-remedy.
- **Add some moisture to your living area.** Use a humidifier in your bedroom. Even a large bowl of water or a wet towel hung up in your room will help.
- **Gargle with warm salt water** several times daily: add ½ teaspoon salt to ½ glass of warm water.
- **Take mild over-the-counter pain relievers** such as acetaminophen 1000 mg. (*Tylenol 2*-extra strength tablets) **OR** ibuprofen 400 mg. (*Advil* -2 tablets) every 4-6 hours, unless you have liver disease or an allergy to these medications.
- **You may use non-prescription throat lozenges or sore-throat spray** for temporary relief.
- **An ice pack applied to your neck** for 20 minutes several times daily can also help reduce pain .
- **Return to University Health Center if your symptoms become worse.**

Revised: April 2008



SORE THROATS

Causes and Cures



"Say ah..."

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME
NOTRE DAME IN 46556
<http://uhs.nd.edu>