

SORE THROAT

INTRODUCTION

Sore throats are mainly caused by viruses. It is often a symptom of various illnesses such as colds and flu, glandular fever, respiratory tract infections, tonsillitis, quinsy, chickenpox, measles and mumps.

SYMPTOMS

There is a raw feeling at the back of the throat, discomfort on swallowing, occasional earache, redness and swelling of the throat, enlarged and tender glands (lymph nodes) in the neck, and slight fever.

CAUSES

Many germs, both viruses and bacteria, can cause throat infections. Viruses are the more common cause of sore throats, and the most common type of bacteria is *streptococcus pyogenes*.

Sore throat can also be caused by scalding from hot liquids or by eating food that irritates or damages the throat.

TREATMENT

Sore throats are usually mild and can be treated at home with over-the-counter (OTC) remedies available from the pharmacy. They usually get better on their own, in 3-7 days. It is extremely rare for antibiotics to be needed. This is only the case when the sore throat is the result of a serious bacterial infection.

Common sore throat remedies include:

Painkillers - Paracetamol or ibuprofen can be taken to ease the pain of a sore throat.

Pastilles, lozenges and warm drinks- One of the most effective treatments for a sore throat is producing saliva to lubricate the throat and wash any infection away. For this reason, sucking any pastille, lozenge or boiled sweet can help to relieve a sore throat. It is also helpful to drink plenty of fluids, and warm drinks may be especially soothing. Many pastilles contain demulcents (relieves irritation) for example glycerine or honey; which can safely be taken by most people to stop their throat from feeling dry. Please note that honey should not be given to babies under the age of 12 months. Diabetics should also be careful as many of these pastilles have a high sugar content. Sugar-free pastilles are also available.

Antiseptic pastilles- Some pastilles also contain antiseptic agents for example Benzalkonium, Dequalinium, Cetylpyridinium, Phenol and tyrothrycin (a weak antibacterial drug). Since most sore throats are caused by viral infections their value is limited.

Salt water- Gargling can be a good way to relieve a sore throat. Gargles should not be swallowed, but spat out after gargling is done. Salt water (a teaspoonful of salt in a glass of warm water) is traditionally used.

Local anaesthetics- for example Benzocaine and Lignocaine are used in both lozenges and throat sprays. If there is difficulty swallowing due to a sore throat these can be helpful and reduce pain. Children or elderly people should not use local anaesthetic lozenges or sprays. No one should use them for more than 5 days.