

## Sore Throat

A sore throat can be caused by many things, from viral infections (most often, the common cold or flu) and bacterial infections (strep throat and some cases of tonsillitis) to seasonal allergies and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

### Causes

Many sore throats are due to:

- Strep throat, which is a contagious bacterial infection of the throat and tonsils (the fleshy clusters of tissue on both sides of the back of the throat). It also can cause headache and fever.
- Tonsillitis, which is usually not serious but can lead to complications, like breathing or swallowing trouble. Most cases are caused by either a virus (such as a common cold virus or Epstein Barr virus, the virus that causes mono) or strep bacteria.

### Signs and symptoms

- painful throat
- fever
- swollen glands in the neck
- bad breath
- scratchiness in the throat
- redness in the back of the mouth

### Treatment

Treatment for a sore throat will depend on what's causing it. Treating an underlying condition like GERD or allergies can bring relief, as can home care like gargling with saltwater, running a cool mist humidifier at night and avoiding irritants like smoke.

Strep throat requires medical treatment with antibiotics, which will improve symptoms quickly. Untreated strep throat can lead to complications like rheumatic fever (which can cause permanent heart damage), a peritonsillar abscess, scarlet fever or kidney disease.

Treatment for tonsillitis depends on whether it's caused by a virus or by bacteria. Doctors usually will test for strep bacteria with a rapid strep test or a throat culture. Tonsillitis caused by a virus will go away on its own. If it's caused by strep bacteria, the doctor probably will prescribe an antibiotic. If so, it's important to take all of the antibiotic for as long as prescribed to help prevent complications.

People with tonsillitis or strep throat can return to activities 24 hours after beginning antibiotic treatment if there's no fever and they're feeling better. If someone is still feeling weak, tired or achy, staying home for another day or two is recommended.

### Keep in mind

To help prevent the spread of strep throat or tonsillitis to others:

- wash hands well and often
- keep eating utensils separate and wash them in hot, soapy water or a dishwasher after each use
- don't share food, drinks, napkins or towels
- sneeze or cough into a shirtsleeve, not your hands

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