

Sore Throat - Symptom

Definition

- Pain, discomfort or raw feeling of the throat
- Pain is made worse when swallows
- The infection is in the throat and usually also involves the tonsils.
- Children less than 2 years of age usually can't complain about a sore throat. A young child who does not want favorite foods may have a sore throat. They may also start to cry during feedings.

Health Information

Causes

- Usually caused by an infection of the throat (pharyngitis). Since the tonsils are in that area, they are usually also infected (tonsillitis).
- **Colds (URIs).** Most sore throats are part of a cold. In fact, a sore throat may be the only symptom for the first 24 hours.
- **Influenza.** A sore throat can be the first symptom in flu infections.
- **Viral pharyngitis.** Some viruses cause a sore throat without nasal symptoms.
- **Herpangina.** A special viral infection of the throat that causes little ulcers near the tonsils.
- **Strep pharyngitis.** Group A Strep is the most common bacterial cause. It accounts for 20% of persistent sore throats. Only these need an antibiotic.
- **Postnasal drip.** Drainage from sinus congestion can cause a sore throat. Sometimes, it's because the secretions are irritating to the throat. More often, it's from the frequent throat clearing.
- **Mouth breathing.** Children who sleep with the mouth open may wake with a sore throat. It feels better within an hour of having something to drink. Use a humidifier to help prevent a dry mouth.

Strep Throat

- Symptoms include sore throat, fever, headache, stomach pain, nausea and vomiting.
- Cough, hoarseness, red eyes, and runny nose are usually not seen with Strep throat. These symptoms point more to a viral cause.
- Scarlet fever rash (fine, red, sandpaper-like rash) is highly suggestive of Strep throat.
- Peak age: 5 to 15 years old. Not common under 2 years old unless sibling has Strep.
- Diagnosis should be confirmed by a Strep test before starting treatment. There is no risk to wait until a Strep test is done.
- Standard treatment is with antibiotics by mouth.

Prevention of Spread to Others

- Good hand washing can prevent spread of infection.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- Most sore throats are just part of a cold and caused by a virus.
- A cough, hoarse voice or nasal discharge points to a cold as the cause
- If a sore throat is the only symptom, it's still usually viral. A fever or swollen neck lymph nodes point to this as the cause.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. **Sore Throat Pain Relief:**
 - Age over 1 year. Can sip warm fluids such as warm chicken broth or apple juice. Some children prefer cold foods such as popsicles or ice cream.
 - Age over 6 years. Can also suck on hard candy or lollipops. Butterscotch seems to help.
 - Age over 8 years. Can also gargle. Use warm water with a little table salt added. A liquid antacid can be added instead of salt. Use Mylanta or the store brand. No prescription is needed.
 - Medicated throat sprays or lozenges are generally not helpful.
3. **Pain Medicine:**
 - To help with the pain, give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Use as needed.
4. **Fever:**
 - For fevers above 102° F (39° C), give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Note: Lower fevers are important for fighting infections.
 - For ALL fevers: Keep your child well hydrated. Give lots of cold fluids.
5. **Antibiotics Not Needed:**
 - Antibiotics are not helpful for viral infections.
 - They can only kill bacteria.
6. **Fluids and Soft Diet:**
 - Try to get your child to drink adequate fluids.
 - Goal: Keep your child well hydrated.
 - Cold drinks, milk shakes, popsicles, slushes, and sherbet are good choices.
 - **Solids.** Offer a soft diet. Also avoid foods that need much chewing. Avoid citrus, salty, or spicy foods. Note: Fluid intake is much more important than eating any solids.
 - Swollen tonsils can make some solid foods hard to swallow. Cut food into smaller pieces.
7. **What to Expect:**
 - Most often, sore throats with a viral illness last 4 or 5 days.
8. **Return to School:**
 - Your child can return to school after the fever is gone.
 - Your child should feel well enough to join in normal activities.
 - Also, children with Strep throat need to be taking an antibiotic for 12 hours.

Call Your Doctor If

- Trouble breathing or drooling occurs
- Sore throat is the main symptom and lasts more than 48 hours
- Sore throat with a cold lasts more than 5 days
- Fever lasts more than 3 days
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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