

SORE THROAT AND TONSILLITIS

Sore throats are common and most people get them from time to time. Most are caused by viral infections, such as colds or flu; sometimes they are caused by a bacterial infection. Sore throats usually get better by themselves within 7 days.

Your sore throat could be because of tonsillitis, when the tonsils at the back of your throat are swollen and infected. If you have tonsillitis, swallowing can be painful and you may also:

- have a high temperature (over 38°C or 100.4°F)
- feel sick
- feel tired
- have swollen neck glands
- have a headache or cough.

Tonsillitis usually gets better within 7 days without antibiotic treatment.

Severe tonsillitis may stop you from going to school or work. If you've had several episodes of severe tonsillitis over a long period of time you may need an operation to remove your tonsils. You may also get severe tonsillitis if you have glandular fever.

Rarely, some people get a very sore throat only on one side. This may be a sign of quinsy, when pus collects at the back of the throat, causing severe pain. See your doctor straightaway if you think you have quinsy.

How can I treat my sore throat?

Sore throats usually get better by themselves within 7 days. Antibiotics aren't usually used to treat a sore throat because they are unlikely to make you feel better quickly and they can have unpleasant side effects. Taking antibiotics also encourages harmful bacteria that live inside you to become resistant to them. This means that antibiotics may not work when you really need them.

Take **paracetamol** or **ibuprofen** to bring your temperature down, and help with the pain. Your pharmacist can tell you which is the most suitable for you, and how much to take.

Ibuprofen is often the best choice for adults with a sore throat.

Don't take ibuprofen if you have:

- heart disease or heart failure, high blood pressure or peripheral arterial disease
- had a heart attack or a stroke
- had a stomach ulcer or bleeding in your stomach

- asthma or other allergies
- liver or kidney problems
- a condition that makes you at risk of bleeding or you're taking medicines that may make you more likely to bleed, such as aspirin or warfarin.

If ibuprofen is not suitable for you, take paracetamol.

Give paracetamol to children (but not to children under 3 months old). Children under 12 years old may be given liquid paracetamol. If you are taking warfarin then have an INR test 5 to 7 days after starting paracetamol, because paracetamol may change your INR.

You may not feel like drinking much if your throat hurts, but try to drink plenty of fluids to stop you getting dehydrated.

What else can help?

- Suck throat lozenges, ice lollies or ice cubes. Don't give these to younger children because they may choke. These may be as effective as lozenges or throat sprays with medicine in them.
- Avoid hot drinks because they can irritate your throat.
- Eat cool, soft foods.
- Don't smoke and avoid smoky places.
- Gargle with a mouthwash of warm, salty water. Put half a teaspoon of salt in a glassful of warm water to make the mouthwash. Don't give this to children because it's best not to swallow the mouthwash.

Do I need to see my doctor?

Get medical advice straight away if you:

- have difficulty breathing or opening your mouth
- feel very unwell or you can't swallow
- feel dehydrated (dry mouth, weeing less, weak, tired, dizzy or light-headed, muscle cramps and pains), or if you can't drink
- are drooling
- have a muffled voice or are making a high-pitched sound when you breathe.

See your doctor if:

- your symptoms are getting worse
- your sore throat hasn't started to get better after a week
- you have a persistent temperature of over 38°C
- you don't have a cough
- you are 15 to 25 years old and have had a sore throat for longer than a week and you're feeling very tired – you may have glandular fever
- you have a weakened immune system from cancer therapy, steroid therapy or other medicines or conditions
- you have diabetes, cystic fibrosis or problems with your heart, lungs, kidneys, nerves, muscles or liver
- your child has a sore throat and they were born early (premature)
- you have had rheumatic fever
- you have a rash, flushed cheeks and a swollen tongue – you may have scarlet fever (more common in children).
- you keep getting sore throats.

Can I give a sore throat or tonsillitis to other people?

Yes, you can pass the virus or bacteria causing your sore throat on to other people. If you have a cough, you will cough out tiny droplets containing the virus or bacteria that other people may breathe in, or touch surfaces on which the droplets have landed.

To help stop the infection spreading:

- wash your hands regularly
- don't share glasses or cutlery
- cough or sneeze into a tissue, and throw the tissue away.

Where can I find further information?

NHS Direct Wales: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.