



Sore Throat Treatment Guide



What You Need to Know

What causes sore throats?

Nine out of ten sore throats are caused by viruses. Only one out of ten sore throats are caused by bacteria (strep throat).

Do antibiotics help sore throats?

Antibiotics only help sore throats that are caused by a bacterial infection (strep throat). Strep throat should be treated with antibiotics to avoid complications like scarlet fever or rheumatic fever.

How do I know if it's strep throat?

There are two ways to test for strep throat. A **rapid strep test** is a quick, relatively reliable test that can be performed in a medical office or clinic. A **throat culture** gives more reliable results, but it takes several days to get your results.

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A test for strep throat is recommended for sore throats when you have a sore throat and **two or more** of the following:

- Discharge from tonsils
- Swollen or tender lymph nodes in the neck
- Fever
- No cough

Otherwise...ease the discomfort of a viral sore throat by:

- Avoiding cigarette smoke
- Gargling with dilute salt water
- Getting lots of rest
- Drinking lots of fluids (try to avoid alcohol and caffeine)
- Using throat lozenges
- Taking acetaminophen (Tylenol or generic equivalent) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin or generic equivalent) for fever or pain. Ibuprofen should not be given to children under 6 months, or if dehydrated or vomiting continuously. Over-the-counter decongestants should not be given to children under the age of 3 years. Aspirin should never be used in children with fever due to the risk of stomach upset, intestinal bleeding and Reye syndrome.