



SORE THROAT AND STREP THROAT

Typically, a sore throat is caused by a virus and is accompanied by a cold. A more persistent sore throat may be caused by mononucleosis, a viral infection that may last for weeks. Mild sore throats, however, can simply be caused by smoking, allergies, air pollution, low humidity, yelling, or even by breathing through your mouth while sleeping. This is especially true when your nose is blocked. Yet another cause of sore throat is stomach acid that backs up into the throat.

Strep throat is a specific kind of sore throat that is caused by a bacterium called *Streptococcus*. This tends to affect children between the ages of 4 and 11 more than people who are younger and older. Symptoms of strep throat are likely to include a sore throat with a fever, white or yellow coating on the tonsils, or swollen glands. In children, Strep throat may also be accompanied by a stomachache, nausea, vomiting, or lack of energy. Strep throat rarely causes congestion; if you're congested and you have a sore throat, you are more likely to have a virus than strep throat.

To reduce your chances of getting a sore throat or a Strep throat, avoid things that irritate your throat—such as smoke and yelling—and stay away from people with colds, Strep throat, or mononucleosis. Also, drink plenty of liquids. If you have a viral sore throat, you usually don't need to see a medical professional. Here are six tips for home treatment:

1. Gargle with warm water that has 1/4 teaspoon of salt dissolved in four ounces of water.
2. Drink fluids, and try honey, lemon, and herbal tea to make your throat feel better. Honey should not be given to children under 1 year old.
3. Don't smoke, and try to avoid smoke from other people's cigarettes (second-hand smoke).
4. To relieve pain and to reduce fever, try acetaminophen (such as Tylenol), ibuprofen (such as Motrin), or aspirin, but don't give aspirin to children or teenagers younger than 20.
5. Try sucking on over-the-counter throat lozenges, cough drops, or hard candy. (These are not appropriate remedies for children under 6 years old.)
6. If you think stomach acid may be causing your sore throat, you might want to learn more about heartburn. Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook* for advice on what to do. If you suspect you have a Strep throat, you should call your medical professional. Don't put the appointment off, because a Strep throat needs to be treated with antibiotics.

Symptoms of Strep throat include a sore throat plus two of the following three symptoms:

1. A fever of 101 degrees or higher
2. White or yellow coating on the tonsils
3. Swollen glands in the neck

You should also call your medical professional if you have difficulty breathing; if a child with a sore throat drools a great deal; if a mild sore throat lasts longer than two weeks; or if a rash accompanies your sore throat. A sore throat accompanied by a rash may indicate scarlet fever, which also requires treatment with antibiotics.

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Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at **kp.org** to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.