

SORE THROAT



A sore throat is a common condition that causes pain and irritation in the throat.

Have you ever experienced a sore throat? It's a common symptom that most of us have experienced at some point in our lives. A sore throat can be caused by a variety of factors, including viral or bacterial infections, allergies, or even dry air.¹ In this article, we will explore the causes, symptoms, and treatments of sore throat.

OVERVIEW

A sore throat is caused by inflammation of the throat or pharynx and in medical terms, this is known as "pharyngitis." The condition is characterized by pain, irritation, or scratchiness in the throat. It is a common symptom of many different health conditions, including viral upper respiratory tract infections (like the common cold and influenza,) bacterial infections (e.g., Streptococcal infections, commonly referred to as "Strep throat") gastroesophageal reflux and allergies.^{2A} sore throat can be a minor inconvenience or a severe discomfort that affects your ability to eat, speak, or even breathe.

CAUSES

A sore throat can be caused by:

- **Viral infections:** The most common cause of a sore throat is a viral infection. Many different viruses can cause inflammation of the throat leading to symptoms. These include rhinovirus, adenovirus, influenza virus and corona viruses (including the Novel Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2)
- **Bacterial infections:** Streptococcal and other bacteria can cause severe throat pain, fever, and difficulty swallowing. A common cause of throat pain is acute bacterial tonsillitis.¹**Allergies:** Allergic reactions to environmental irritants, such as pollen or pet dander, can cause a sore throat.

- **Post-nasal drip syndrome:** Post-nasal drip can lead to a sore throat and is often associated with allergies.
- **Dry air:** Inhaling dry air, particularly when a person's nose is blocked and they need to breathe through the mouth can irritate the throat, leading to a scratchy, sore throat especially in the morning.¹
- **Acid reflux:** Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) can cause acid from the stomach to flow back into the throat, leading to irritation and inflammation.²
- **Rare causes:** Cancer, HIV, Fungal infections etc.

Types of Sore Throat

There are two types of sore throat:

- **Acute sore throat:** An acute sore throat comes on suddenly and lasts for a short period, usually less than a week. The cause is usually related to a viral or bacterial infection.³
- **Chronic sore throat:** A chronic sore throat lasts for an extended period, typically more than three weeks. This type of sore throat can be a symptom of a more chronic underlying condition, such as gastroesophageal reflux disease.²

SYMPTOMS

Inflammation of the throat typically causes:

- Pain or irritation in the throat
- Difficulty swallowing
- In very rare cases, throat inflammation may be so severe that it could cause difficulty breathing.

A sore throat may be associated with:

- Swollen glands in the neck
- Hoarse voice
- Fever
- Cough
- Headache¹

DIAGNOSIS

To diagnose the cause of a sore throat, your doctor will perform a physical examination of your throat and neck and will also check for a temperature. A thorough examination of your lungs, heart and abdomen should also be performed. In most cases, the diagnosis can be made with a history and examination, although further tests (e.g., throat swabs, blood tests or even radiological and other imaging) may be needed to diagnose and/or exclude certain conditions.



TREATMENT

The treatment of a sore throat depends on the underlying cause. If a bacterial infection is the suspected cause, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics to help clear up the infection. For viral infections treatment typically involves rest, fluids, pain relievers (e.g., paracetamol) and other medication to help manage symptoms.

Allergic conditions are managed with antihistamines and nasal sprays. Should your doctor suspect gastroesophageal reflux, remedies to treat this condition will be prescribed.

In addition to medication, there are several home remedies that may help alleviate the symptoms of a sore throat, including:

- Gargling with warm salt water
- Drinking warm liquids like tea with honey
- Using a humidifier to add moisture to the air
- Resting your voice²

PREVENTION AND LIFESTYLE CHANGES

To help prevent sore throat, you can take several steps, including:

- Washing your hands frequently
- Avoiding close contact with sick individuals
- Staying hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids
- Stopping smoking
- Avoiding exposure to environmental irritants
- Cultivating and maintaining a strong immune system by adopting a healthy lifestyle including regular exercise and a healthy diet.

If you have a sore throat, it is important to cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing to prevent the possible spread of viruses or bacteria.

Please note: this is an education information leaflet only and should not be used for diagnosis. For more information on **Sore Throat**, consult your healthcare professional.

This referenced content has been reviewed by Dr Cilliers, who is a qualified medical doctor with extensive experience in the private healthcare sector of South Africa, particularly in the disciplines of emergency medicine, general practice, geriatrics, healthcare leadership, sub-acute care and physical rehabilitation.

References: **1.** Mayo Clinic Staff. (2022, April 7). Sore throat. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/sore-throat/symptoms-causes/syc-20351635> **2.** National Health Service. (2021, September 1). Sore throat. NHS. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sore-throat/> **3.** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, March 18). Sore throat. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/community/for-patients/common-illnesses/sore-throat.html> **4.** American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery. (2019, October 2). Sore throat. ENT Health. <https://www.enthealth.org/conditions/sore-throat/>

