

Self Care Information for Patients: Sore Throat

Summary

Sore throats are very common. They are self-limiting and will often resolve within a week without treatment. Sore throats are usually caused by viruses and so antibiotics will not improve your symptoms and can cause unpleasant side effects. Self care measures or a visit to your local pharmacist can help ease your sore throat. What can you do to help?

- Over-the-counter medication. Try Paracetamol for pain and fever. You can also try Ibuprofen, if suitable. (Some people find medicated throat lozenges or antiseptic throat sprays help too, although there is no evidence to support this benefit).
- Drink fluids. Drink plenty of warm or cool fluids. Avoid very hot drinks.
- Rest. Sleep and rest your voice.
- Try sucking ice cubes or hard sweets, but do not give to young children due to risk of choking.
- Avoid smoking and smoky environments that may irritate your throat.
- Gargle with warm salt water (adults only).
- Eat cool, soft foods. These will soothe your throat.

When shall I see a General Practitioner (GP)?

- If your symptoms have not improved after a week.
- If you have frequently occurring sore throats.
- If you have a weakened immune system or are taking medication that can cause a sore throat.
- If you feel hot and shivery or have a high temperature (over 38°C).
- If your symptoms are severe and not responding to pain killers.
- If you are worried about your sore throat.

When shall I call 999?

- If you have difficulty breathing or swallowing.
- If you are drooling.
- If your symptoms are severe or rapidly getting worse.
- If you have stridor: a high-pitched sound as you breathe.

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