A Note About Strep Throat

Strep throat is a common bacterial infection that affects the throat and tonsils. It can only be diagnosed by throat culture. See "Consult health care personnel" to determine when a culture is indicated.

Strep throat pain, like pain of sore throats caused by viruses, can be relieved somewhat with measures mentioned. Antibiotics are not given to relieve throat pain, but are given to prevent complications that can occur in untreated strep infections. Complications include rheumatic heart disease and glomerulonephritis (inflammation of the kidney). For this reason, if an antibiotic is prescribed it is very important to take all of it as instructed.

Visit the Student Health World Wide Web site at http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth

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What is it?
A sore throat is an inflammation of the throat caused by either viruses or bacteria.

How do you catch it?
The infection is spread by sharing drinks, kissing, sneezing, nose blowing, and by contaminated objects passed from hand to mouth.

What are the symptoms?
Symptoms can include:
• painful, red throat
• difficulty swallowing
• swollen tonsils
• headache
• feeling “blah”
• swollen lymph nodes (“glands”)

What can you do?
Whether the sore throat is due to a virus or bacteria, the following will help to make you feel better:

FLUIDS: Clear liquids are most soothing and help to thin out the mucus at the back of your throat. Cold sodas, popsicles and mild (not citric) juices are often preferred although some people find warmer liquids feel better.

WARM SALT WATER GARGLES: These help to soothe and heal. Add 1/2 teaspoon of table salt to 1 cup of warm tap water and gargle with this solution at least four times a day.

THROAT LOZENGES: (look for ingredients that contain phenol or end in “-caine”.) These give temporary relief of pain.

PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE: Wash your hands, cover your nose and mouth when sneezing, and properly dispose of used facial tissues.

DON’T SMOKE: Smoking irritates and dries the mucous membranes that line the nose and throat.

TAKE IBUPROFEN or ACETAMINOPHEN according to the label directions every 4-6 hours for fever and discomfort. Ibuprofen has anti-inflammatory properties and may be of more help in relieving pain from a swollen sore throat.

TAKE ANTIBIOTICS ONLY IF DIRECTED BY HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS. Antibiotics are useful and often necessary in treating bacterial infections; however, viruses do not respond to antibiotics.

Consult health care personnel:
• if you have fever higher than 101°F (38.3°C).
• if sore throat lasts more than 5 days.
• if you see pus on your tonsils.
• if you develop a sore throat after being in contact with someone diagnosed as having strep throat.
• if sore throat seems severe and/or worsens quickly.
• if you have a sore throat with a previous diagnosis of rheumatic heart disease, rheumatic fever or heart murmur.
• anytime you are unsure of what to do.

A throat culture might be taken to determine whether you have a viral or bacterial infection and if further medical treatment is needed (results take 24-48 hours).