SORE THROATS

Sore throats can be caused by many things. Viruses, yeast and bacteria can lead to infections that can cause the throat to swell and become very sore. Other things that can cause sore throat include smoking, breathing polluted air, drinking alcohol, and hay fever and other allergies. Viruses are the most common cause of pharyngitis (sore throat).

What is tonsillitis?
Tonsillitis means swelling of the tonsils. It's usually caused by a bacterial infection, though sometimes a virus may be involved. Your tonsils are located toward the back of your tongue on each side of your throat. Signs of strep throat and tonsillitis are often alike.

If I have tonsillitis, will I need a tonsillectomy?
A tonsillectomy is the surgery used to remove tonsils. Most people who have *tonsillitis* don't need a tonsillectomy. You might need a tonsillectomy if you get severe tonsillitis often or if your tonsils are too large and cause problems with your breathing or swallowing. Your doctor can tell you if a tonsillectomy is needed.

What is strep throat?
Strep throat is caused by a type of bacteria called Streptococcus. The pain of strep throat often feels much like sore throats that are caused by other bacteria or by viruses. What's important and different about strep throat is that untreated strep infections can sometimes result in rheumatic fever, which can damage the valves of the heart and other organs of the body. Rheumatic fever can be prevented by taking antibiotics for 10 days.

Symptoms of tonsillitis or strep throat
- Sore red throat
- Fever
- Headache
- White patches in your throat or on your tonsils
- Pain when you swallow
- Large, red tonsils
- Swollen, sore glands
- **No Cough**

Mononucleosis (mono) is caused by the Epstein-Barr virus. One of the main signs of mono is sore throat. Others include swollen glands in neck, armpits and groin, fever and chills, headache, problems breathing, whitish membrane over the tonsils and feeling tired.

How does a bacterial infection differ from a viral infection?
The coughing, muscle pains and a runny nose are more common with viral infections.

What tests may be used to find the cause of my sore throat?
Your doctor may do *a rapid strep test, a throat culture* or both. A rapid strep test will give results fast (often within an hour). But the test won't tell if your sore throat is caused by a bacteria other than Streptococcus or if it's caused by a virus. A throat culture takes longer - about 24 hours - but it's more accurate. If your doctor thinks you many have mono, he or she will probably do a blood test.

What is the treatment for a sore throat caused by bacteria?
If your sore throat is caused by Streptococcus, your family doctor will likely prescribe penicillin, taken by mouth for 10 days. Another antibiotic, called erythromycin, can be used if you're allergic to penicillin. If your doctor gives you an antibiotic, be sure you take all of the medicine. Taking all of the medicine helps ensure that the infection doesn't come back or cause you other problems.

What is the treatment for a sore throat caused by a virus?
If your sore throat is caused by a virus, antibiotics won't help. Infections caused by viruses usually just have to run their course. The symptoms will go away as your body gets rid of the virus. Most symptoms caused by a cold-type virus go away in a week to 10 days. Symptoms caused by mono can last for four weeks or more. If you have mono, you should get plenty of rest and not exercise too hard. You can take acetaminophen (some examples are Panadol, Tylenol) or ibuprofen (some examples are Advil, Medipren, Motrin IB) for the headache and other aches. These tips can help ease the pain of sore throat.

Easing the pain of a sore throat
- Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- Gargle with warm salt water (1 teaspoon of salt in 1 cup of water).
- Suck on throat lozenges or hard candy (low in sugar).
- Eat soft foods.
- Suck on Popsicles.
- Use a humidifier.
- Drink lots of fluids.

The best ways to avoid catching or passing a viruses or bacteria that can lead to a sore throat are to wash your hands often, avoid touching your eyes or mouth, and cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing.