



Sore throat relief

Lynn Lambert

Introduction

Sore throat is one of the most common conditions with which patients present in the pharmacy. Also known as pharyngitis, sore throat is often described as pain, scratchiness, or irritation that often worsens with swallowing. Viral or bacterial infections typically cause sore throat. However, allergies, dry air and irritants such as tobacco smoke are non-infectious reasons one may have a dry, scratchy or irritated throat. A sore throat usually lasts between three and seven days and then clears without complications.

Treating a sore throat

Treatment for a sore throat depends on the cause. Antibiotics are reserved for sore throat caused by bacterial infections such as Strep throat to prevent the spread of infection and complications. There is no specific treatment for sore throat related to a viral infection such as the common cold, and a sore throat of this nature should not be treated with antibiotics. Instead, treatment and advice are aimed at alleviating pain.

Simple analgesics should be considered first-line treatment

Fast and effective pain relief for a sore throat can be obtained using over-the-counter (OTC) analgesics such as paracetamol or a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) such as ibuprofen or naproxen.

Topical therapies contain ingredients that may provide symptomatic relief

- Topical analgesics are available as single-ingredient formulations or in combination for multi-action purposes. The following ingredients are often found in topical analgesics:
 - Lidocaine (lignocaine), dibucaine and benzocaine are some examples of local anaesthetics that may be included

in mouth and throat products. Local anaesthetics have a numbing effect which helps to ease the pain.

- Flurbiprofen is an anti-inflammatory approved to treat sore throat in adults and children over the age of 12 years.
- Benzydamine has anaesthetic, pain-relieving and anti-inflammatory activity.
- Menthol is sometimes included for its cooling and anaesthetic effect.
- Antiseptics and disinfectants may be used for the treatment of minor or superficial infections. Examples include cetylpyridinium chloride, chlorhexidine gluconate, dequalinium chloride and dichlorobenzyl alcohol in combination with amylmetacresol. Phenol is an antiseptic and disinfectant agent and also has a local anaesthetic effect.

Home-care tips for relieving a sore throat

Pharmacists' assistants are well-positioned to provide advice to patients for sore throat relief, such as:

- Resting, especially when other symptoms accompany a sore throat.
- Staying hydrated since a sore throat may make it difficult for patients to swallow. As a result, many patients, especially children, may be reluctant to eat. Therefore, patients should be encouraged to drink plenty of cool or warm fluids. Sipping on warm beverages (e.g. honey or lemon tea), cold beverages or frozen desserts may provide relief.
- Avoiding foods that may aggravate a sore throat. Children, in particular, should be fed soft, bland foods.
- Using the age-old remedy to gargle with salt water. While its efficacy is not known, it is not harmful. A suitable solution is made by dissolving half a teaspoonful of salt in a glass of warm water and gargling as often as necessary.
- Using a humidifier to help moisten the air (in the home) if it is too dry and is causing a dry, scratchy feeling in the throat.

Important considerations

- Due to the potential association between aspirin and Reye's syndrome, aspirin should be avoided in children (under the age of 16 years).
- The manufacturers' recommendations regarding the use of an OTC product should be carefully read and observed.
- The suitability of a product for children should be considered before recommending it.
- Lozenges, hard sweets or ice cubes should not be given to children younger than five years because of the risk of choking.
- Children younger than six years are not usually able to gargle properly. Therefore, gargles should not be advised for these children.
- Throat sprays are generally not recommended for children.
- The use of honey, while recommended for its soothing properties, should not be used in children under one year of age.
- While most sore throats are self-limiting and resolve within a week, patients should be advised to see their doctor if there is no improvement after a week.

Conclusion

Most sore throats are viral in nature, for which OTC remedies are available to provide symptomatic relief. It is important to be

cognisant of patient safety when recommending treatment or advice to patients, particularly in children.

Bibliography

- Cleveland Clinic. Sore throat (Pharyngitis). [Internet]. Available from: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/8274-sore-throat-pharyngitis>. Accessed 11 Aug 2021.
- Davis S. Sprays and gargles for a sore throat. SA Pharmacist's Assistant. 2016;16:4.
- Fried MP. Sore Throat. [Internet] Apr 2020. Available from: <https://www.msmanuals.com/home/ear,-nose,-and-throat-disorders/symptoms-of-nose-and-throat-disorders/sore-throat>. Accessed 3 Feb 2021.
- Harvard Health Publishing. Sore throat (Pharyngitis). [Internet]. Feb 2020. Available from: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/sore-throat-pharyngitis-a-to-z>. Accessed 3 Feb 2021.
- Mayo Clinic. Sore throat. [Internet] June 2021. Available from: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/sore-throat/symptoms-causes/syc-20351635>. Accessed 11 Aug 2021.
- Moroney Y. Sore throat. SA Pharmacist's Assistant. 2019;19:2.
- Sambrook J. Laryngitis. [Internet] Jul 2018. Available from: <https://patient.info/ears-nose-throat-mouth/laryngitis-leaflet>. Accessed 3 Feb 2021.
- Sasaki CT. Throat infection. [Internet] Jan 2020. Available from: <https://www.msmanuals.com/home/ear,-nose,-and-throat-disorders/mouth-and-throat-disorders/throat-infection?query=Tonsillopharyngitis>. Accessed 3 Feb 2021.
- Schmidt S. Sore throat. SA Pharmacist's Assistant. 2016;16:4.
- Stead W. Patient education: Sore throat in adults (Beyond the Basics). [Internet] Jan 2021. Available from: <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/sore-throat-in-adults-beyond-the-basics>. Accessed 3 Feb 2021.
- Wald ER. Patient education: Sore throat in children (Beyond the Basics). [Internet] Jan 2021. Available from: <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/sore-throat-in-children-beyond-the-basics>. Accessed 3 Feb 2021.

