

## Pharyngitis



### What is Pharyngitis?

Pharyngitis is inflammation of the pharynx—the back of the throat. This can cause a sore throat, as well as scratchiness in the throat and difficulty swallowing.

### Symptoms

The symptoms that accompany pharyngitis vary depending on the underlying condition.

In addition to a sore, dry, or scratchy throat, a cold or flu may cause:

- sneezing
- runny nose
- headache
- cough
- fatigue
- body aches
- chills
- fever (low grade with cold but higher with flu)
- trouble swallowing
- red throat with white patches
- swollen lymph nodes
- loss of appetite and nausea
- unusual taste in mouth
- general malaise

### Complications

Complications may include:

- Ear infection
- Mastoiditis

- Sinusitis
- Peritonsillar abscess

## **Causes**

**Viruses are the most common cause of sore throats, but some sore throats are caused by bacterial infections.**

Individuals who are frequently exposed to colds and flus, such as healthcare workers or children in day care are the most likely to develop pharyngitis. Individuals who have allergies, experience frequent sinus infections, or who have been exposed to second-hand smoke are also more likely to develop pharyngitis.

### **Viral Infection**

Pharyngitis is most commonly caused by viral infections such as the common cold, influenza, or mononucleosis. Viral infections do not respond to antibiotics, and treatment is only necessary to help relieve symptoms.

### **Bacterial Infection**

Less commonly, pharyngitis is caused by a bacterial infection. Bacterial infections do require antibiotics. The most common bacterial infection of the throat is strep throat, which is caused by *streptococcus A*. Rare causes of bacterial pharyngitis include gonorrhea, chlamydia, and corynebacterium.

## **Diagnosis**

### **Physical Exam**

If you are experiencing symptoms of pharyngitis, your doctor will look at your throat. He or she will check for any white patches, swelling, and redness. Your doctor may also look in your ears and nose. To check for swollen lymph nodes, your doctor will feel the sides of your neck.

### **Throat Culture**

If your doctor suspects that you have strep throat, he or she will take a throat culture. This involves using a swab to take a sample of the secretions from your throat. Most doctors are able to do a rapid strep test in the office. This test will tell your doctor within a few minutes if the test is positive for *streptococcus*. Your doctor may also send the swab to a lab to test for strep bacteria.

### **Blood Tests**

If your doctor suspects another cause of your pharyngitis, he or she may order blood work. A simple blood test can determine whether you have mononucleosis. A complete blood count (CBC) test may

be done to determine if you have another type of infection. There are numerous viral and bacterial agents that can cause pharyngitis. They include:

- measles
- chickenpox
- croup (a childhood illness distinguished by a barking cough)
- whooping cough

## **Statistics**

Approximately 30 million cases of pharyngitis are diagnosed annually.

- Pharyngitis accounts for 2% of all ambulatory visits.
- Streptococcal infection occurs predominantly in patients between the ages of 5 and 18 years.
- Pharyngitis in patients under 3 years old is uncommon but possible, especially in the carrier state in the household; it is nearly always due to viral etiologies.
- Individuals with a positive family history of rheumatic fever have a higher incidence of rheumatic complications if streptococcal infections are untreated.

## **Treatment**

The following tips may help your sore throat feel better:

- Use Q-TONS Throat Spray as per directed.
- Rest in a quiet, warm place and try to sleep.
- Ensure you drink enough fluids as dehydration can make you feel worse.
- Sucking throat pastilles which contain a mild anaesthetic may help to soothe your throat.
- Gargling with salt water may ease the pain in your throat.
- Brush your teeth twice a day (with fluoride toothpaste).
- Floss regularly to remove plaque from between teeth. Or use a device such as a special brush or wooden or plastic pick recommended by a dental professional.
- Visit the dentist routinely for a check-up and professional cleaning.
- Don't smoke