



**University
Hospitals Sussex**
NHS Foundation Trust

Sore throat advice

Accident and emergency

Patient information

Common causes of a sore throat

Sore throats are usually caused by viruses, like colds or the flu. Less often, they are caused by bacteria.

Some common conditions that cause sore throats include:

- Laryngitis
- Tonsillitis
- Strep throat (a bacterial infection)
- Glandular fever.

Sore throats are very common and usually nothing to worry about. Most will get better on their own within a week.

When to call 999 or go to A&E immediately

Get urgent medical help if:

- You are struggling to breathe
- You cannot swallow, even with pain relief
- You are drooling or spitting out saliva because it is too painful to swallow
- You make a high-pitched noise when breathing in (this is called stridor)
- Your symptoms are severe and getting worse quickly.

These signs may mean your breathing is affected and need urgent assessment.

In hospital, you may be given stronger pain relief. Some patients can go home afterward, but if needed, you might be admitted for:

- IV fluids (if you cannot drink enough)
- Antibiotics
- Steroids.

If prescribed antibiotics, be sure to finish the full course, even if you feel better, to prevent the infection coming back.

How to treat a sore throat at home

Most sore throats can be managed with rest, fluids, and simple pain relief.

Try the following:

- Gargle with warm salty water (not for children).
- Drink plenty of water (avoid hot drinks).
- Eat soft, cool foods.
- Avoid smoking and smoky environments.

Suck on ice cubes, ice lollies, or hard sweets. Never give young children anything small and hard to suck because of the risk of choking.

Pain relief options:

- Paracetamol can help with pain and fever. Always check labels if taking other cold or flu remedies to avoid accidentally taking too much.
- Ibuprofen (a type of NSAID) may also help. Not everyone can take it safely. Speak to your pharmacist first, especially if you are older or have other health conditions. Stop taking it if it causes stomach pain and contact your GP.

Do I need antibiotics?

Usually not. Sore throats often get better without antibiotics. They will only be prescribed if your GP thinks it is likely a bacterial infection.

When to see your GP

Contact your GP if:

- Your symptoms have not improved after a week.
- You feel hot and shivery (feverish).
- You have a sore throat and a very high temperature
- You are worried about your sore throat
- You have a weakened immune system
(for example, due to chemotherapy or diabetes).

Further support

For general medical advice please use the NHS website, the **NHS 111** service, walk-in-centres, or your GP.

The NHS website provides online health information and guidance.

There are walk-in and urgent treatment services at Brighton Station, Crawley Urgent Treatment Centre, Lewes Victoria Hospital, Horsham Minor Injuries Unit and Bognor Regis War Memorial Hospital.

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This information is intended for patients receiving care in Brighton & Hove or Haywards Heath.

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