

# Sore Throat

## What is a sore throat?

Sore throat is a common symptom that ranges in severity from just a sense of scratchiness to severe pain.

Pharyngitis is the medical term for sore throat.

## What is the cause?

Sore throat is caused by irritation of the throat. A sore throat may be the first symptom of a usually mild illness, like a cold or the flu. Sometimes it is a symptom of more serious illness, like mononucleosis.

A sore throat that comes on suddenly is called acute pharyngitis. It can be caused by bacteria or a virus. It can also happen when an infection of the airways, sinuses, or mouth spreads to the throat.

Other causes of sore throat include:

- Hay fever
- Cigarette smoking or secondhand smoke
- Breathing heavily polluted air or chemical fumes
- Swallowing sharp foods that hurt the lining of the throat, such as a tortilla chip
- Dry air
- Heartburn (gastric reflux)
- Postnasal drip from draining sinuses

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- A raw feeling in the throat that makes breathing, swallowing, or speaking painful
- Redness of the throat
- Fever
- Hoarseness
- Pus in your throat
- Tender, swollen glands (lymph nodes) in your neck
- Earache (you may feel pain in your ears even though the problem is in your throat)

## How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your recent medical history and your symptoms and examine your throat. Your provider also will examine you for signs of other illness, such as sinus, chest, or ear infections.

Just by looking at your throat, it is often hard for your healthcare provider to decide whether a virus or bacteria are causing your sore throat. Your provider may swab your throat to test for strep infection.

## **How is it treated?**

Usually no specific medical treatment is needed if a virus is causing the sore throat. The throat most often gets better on its own within 5 to 7 days. Antibiotic medicine does not cure viral pharyngitis.

For acute pharyngitis caused by bacteria, your healthcare provider may prescribe an antibiotic. You will feel better after you have taken antibiotics for 2 to 3 days. You must, though, take all of your antibiotic even when you are feeling better. If you don't take all of it, your sore throat could come back.

For pharyngitis that keeps coming back, your provider will look for other causes, such as allergies.

## **How can I take care of myself?**

- Don't smoke.
- Avoid secondhand smoke and other air pollutants.
- Use a cool mist humidifier to add moisture to the air.
- Get plenty of rest.
- You may want to rest your throat by talking less and eating a diet that is mostly liquid or soft for a day or two. Avoid salty or spicy foods and citrus fruits.
- Nonprescription throat lozenges and mouthwashes should help relieve the soreness.
- Gargling with warm saltwater and drinking warm liquids may help. (You can make a saltwater solution by adding 1/4 teaspoon of salt to 8 ounces, or 240 mL, of warm water.)
- A nonprescription pain reliever such as aspirin, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen may ease general aches and pains. Check with your healthcare provider before you give any medicine that contains aspirin or salicylates to a child or teen. This includes medicines like baby aspirin, some cold medicines, and Pepto-Bismol. Children and teens who take aspirin are at risk for a serious illness called Reye's syndrome.

If a sore throat lasts for more than a few days, call your healthcare provider.

## **How can I prevent a sore throat?**

The following suggestions may help prevent a sore throat:

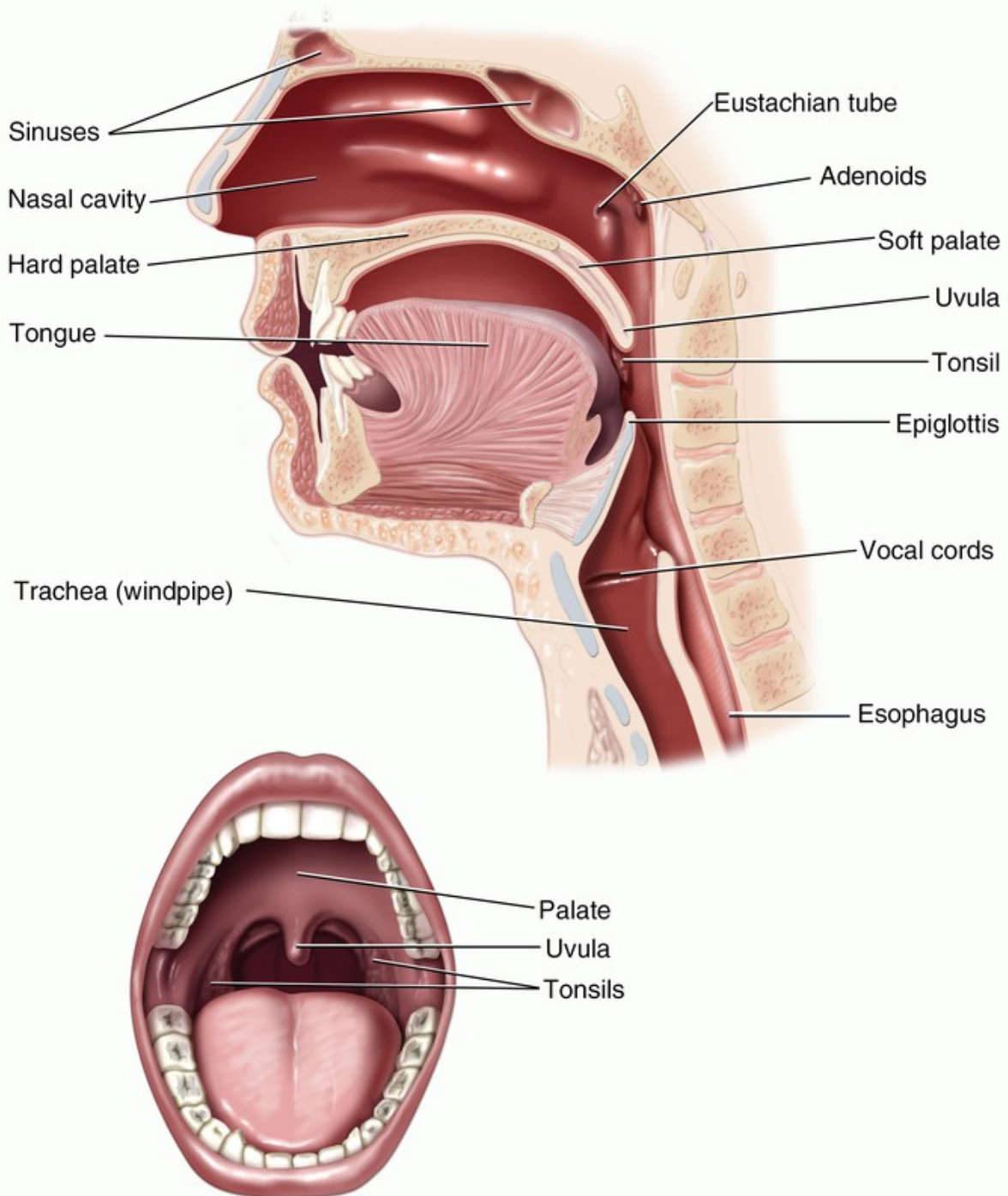
- Don't share eating and drinking utensils with others.
- Wash your hands often.
- Don't let your nose or mouth touch public telephones or drinking fountains.
- Avoid close contact with other people who have a sore throat.

- Stay indoors as much as possible on high-pollution days.
- Don't stay in areas where there is heavy smoke from cigarettes.
- Use a humidifier in your home if the air is quite dry.

Developed by RelayHealth.

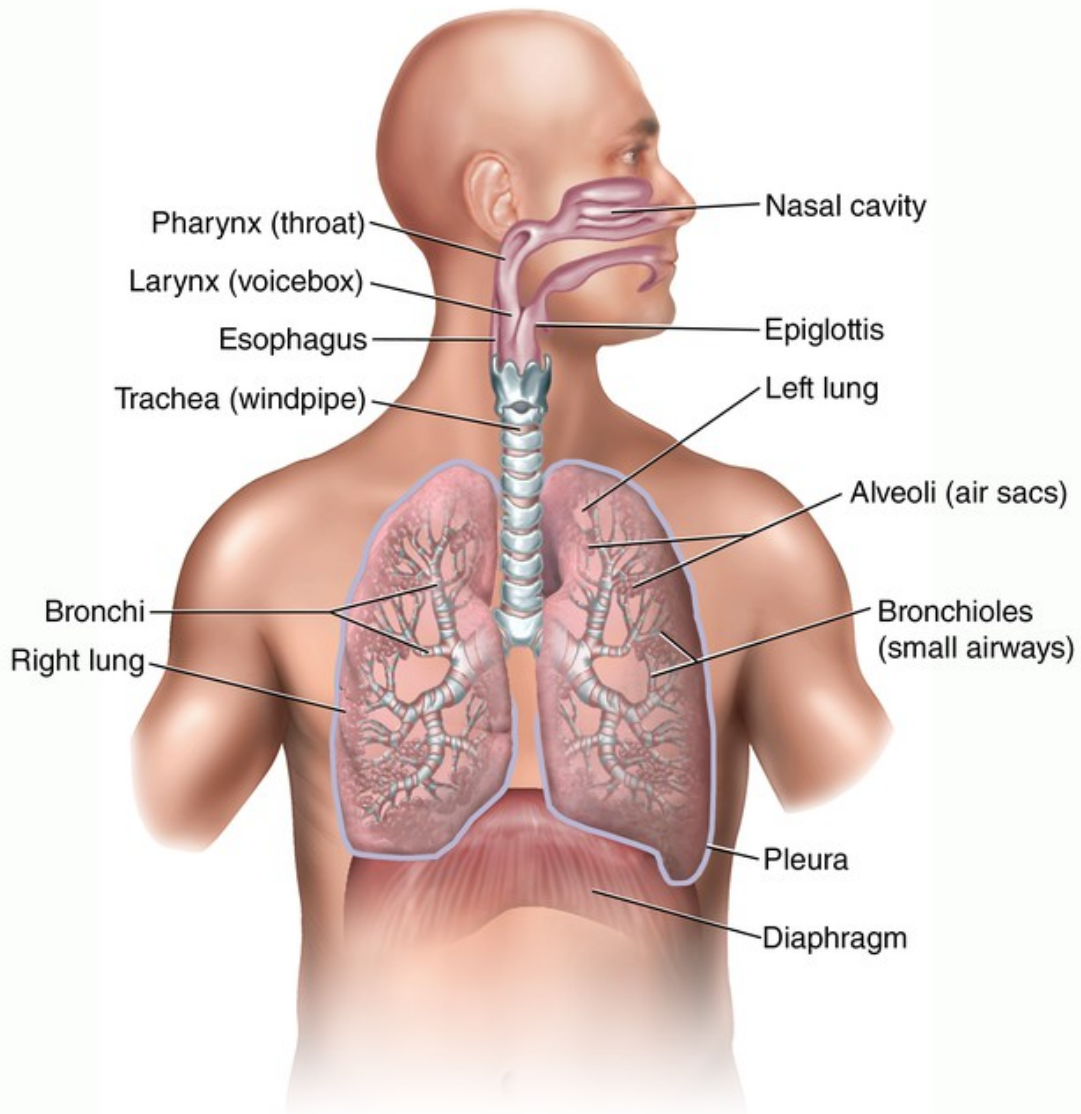
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# Head and Throat



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# Respiratory System



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