

PHARYNGITIS

BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Inflammation and infection of the pharynx that can be caused by a variety of germs.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Sore throat.
- Swallowing difficulty.
- Tickle or “lump” in the throat.
- Fever.
- Swollen glands in the neck (sometimes).
- Throat may be red or covered with a grayish membrane (sometimes).
- Generalized aching.

CAUSES

Infection from bacteria, viruses or fungi. Following are the most common possibilities:

- Bacteria—*streptococci*, *gonococci*, *Haemophilus*, *pneumococci*, *corynebacterium* or *staphylococci*.
- Viruses—Epstein-Barr and many types of respiratory viruses.
- Fungi—*monilia*.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Illness that has lowered resistance.
- Fatigue or overwork.
- Diabetes mellitus.
- Immune deficiencies.
- Smoking.
- Excess alcohol consumption.
- Oral sex.
- Epidemics, during which all persons are at increased risk.
- Close quarters, such as in military recruits, schools, daycare centers.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid close contact with anyone with a sore throat.
- Keep immunizations, including diphtheria, up to date.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Spontaneous recovery for most cases of viral pharyngitis. Other cases are curable with antibiotic or antifungal drugs.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Epiglottitis, leading to complete breathing obstruction.
- Pneumonia.
- Rheumatic fever, scarlet fever or glomerulonephritis, if pharyngitis is caused by strep bacteria and does not receive adequate antibiotic treatment.
- Ear infection.
- Sinusitis or rhinitis.

TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Laboratory throat culture and blood count may be done to determine type of infection.
- Home care is usually sufficient.
- Hospitalization for pharyngitis caused by diphtherial or *Haemophilus* bacteria.
- Use gargles to relieve throat pain. Prepare double-strength tea, hot or cold, or a salt-water solution (1 tea-spoon salt in 8 oz. warm water). Use to gargle as often as you wish.
- Use a cool-mist ultrasonic humidifier to increase air moisture. This will relieve the dry, tight feeling in the throat. Clean humidifier daily.
- If the glands are large and tender, apply moist, warm soaks at least 4 times a day for 30 to 60 minutes. The compresses will be more effective if they are kept warm. Be careful not to burn the skin.
- Replace your toothbrush. It may be harboring germs.
- Until infection is gone, don't share washcloths; or food.

MEDICATIONS

- For minor discomfort, you may use non-prescription drugs such as acetaminophen. Don't give aspirin to a child for any viral illness. Studies link its use with the development of Reye's syndrome.
- Non-prescription throat lozenges may help ease discomfort.

- Antibiotics or antifungal agents to fight bacterial or fungal infections. Be sure to finish entire course of pre-scribed antibiotics to avoid complications to heart or kidneys.

ACTIVITY

Limited activity is necessary until symptoms disappear.

DIET

Extra fluids are necessary. Drink at least 8 glasses of fluid daily, more for high fevers. If swallowing solid food is painful, try a liquid or soft diet for a few days.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You have symptoms of pharyngitis.
- The following occur during treatment:
 - Breathing or swallowing difficulty.
 - Fever; severe headache. Thick mucus drainage from the nose. Cough that produces green, yellow, brown or bloody sputum.
 - Skin rash. Dark urine. Chest pain.

Adapted from Instructions for Patients, Sixth Edition, H. Winter Griffith, M.D., W.B Saunders Company.