

Strep Throat

What is strep throat?

Strep throat is an infection caused by bacteria. It is most common in children three to 15 years of age. It usually happens in late winter and early spring.

What are the symptoms?

You may have a high fever and a sore, red throat with white or yellow spots inside. You may also have swollen lymph nodes on your neck and under your jaw. If you have a cough, red eyes, and runny nose, strep throat is less likely.

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask you some questions to see if you're at risk. If your doctor thinks you might have it, he or she will swab the back of your throat to test for bacteria. These results will be ready in two days. The rapid strep test gives results the same day.

Do I need antibiotics?

Strep throat usually gets better by itself in about three to five days. Antibiotics can help keep you from spreading it to other people and can prevent some rare complications. If you take antibiotics, you may feel better about one day sooner than if you didn't take them.

Does my family need to be treated?

If someone in your home has symptoms of strep throat, he or she should be tested. Only those who test positive need to be treated.

When will I feel better?

Most people begin to feel better 24 hours after starting antibiotics. Most people who do not take antibiotics feel better within three to five days. Children may go back to school and adults to work 24 hours after starting antibiotics.

When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if your symptoms don't start to get better within three days. If you get a rash or have trouble breathing after taking antibiotics, call your doctor right away. Sometimes a different antibiotic is needed, or you may have an infection other than strep throat. If you are feeling better, a follow-up visit is not usually needed.

Would having my tonsils taken out stop me from getting strep throat again?

It may help if you have a lot of throat infections. Surgery is only recommended for certain people.

July 2016

This handout was adapted with permission from Choby BA. Strep throat [patient handout]. *Am Fam Physician*. 2009;79(5): online. <http://www.aafp.org/afp/2009/0301/p383-s1.html>. Accessed April 20, 2016.

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject. Copyright © 2016 American Academy of Family Physicians. Individuals may photocopy this material for their own personal reference, and physicians may photocopy for use with their own patients. Written permission is required for all other uses, including electronic uses.

