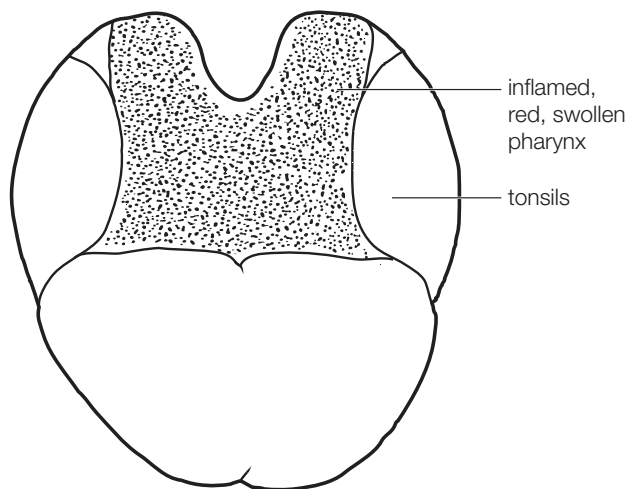


Pharyngitis

What is pharyngitis?

Pharyngitis is inflammation and infection of the pharynx, which is that part of the throat at the back of the tongue between the tonsils and the larynx.



What is the cause of pharyngitis?

The most common cause is a viral infection, which may be part of a common cold or a direct infection. Bacteria and fungi infections are also causes. Irritation and inflammation of the pharynx can also result from irritants such as cigarette smoke, alcohol or excessive use of the voice such as talking above excessive noise. Oral sex may lead to infection with sexually transmitted diseases. Various disorders, such as diabetes, immune deficiencies such as AIDS and poor general health make people prone to pharyngitis.

What are the symptoms?

This depends on whether the infection is acute (sudden onset), which is more severe, or chronic. The following symptoms vary in severity:

- sore throat
- 'tickle' or lump in throat
- difficulty swallowing
- fever (in more severe cases)
- red, swollen throat
- possible muscular aches and pains.

How common is the problem?

It is very common and is by far the most common cause of a sore throat. On average, a person consults a doctor once each year with pharyngitis. It tends to occur in people who are overworked and fatigued.

What is the usual outcome?

With most cases of pharyngitis the throat is extremely sore for 2 to 3 days and then settles quickly. However, if it is due to a bacterial infection, it usually persists and you tend to feel quite ill with fever. This requires medical attention.

What is the treatment?

Self-help

- You and your throat need a rest.
- Do not smoke.
- Have a fluid or soft diet for a few days.
- Drink extra fluids: at least 8 glasses of fluid daily.
- Take aspirin or paracetamol regularly (e.g. 2 soluble tablets 4 times a day). Children should have paracetamol rather than aspirin (avoid aspirin under 16 years).
- Commercial soothing lozenges and mouthwashes may help: avoid those with a topical anaesthetic effect.
- Gargles help give symptomatic relief: a salt solution is useful (mix 1 teaspoon of salt in 500 mL warm or hot water). When the solution cools, gargle as often as you wish.

Medical help

Your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic if inspection of the throat reveals severe pharyngitis due to a bacterial infection. It must be emphasised that most cases are due to viruses and antibiotics make no difference.