

Strep throat ^[1]

Dear Alice,

What is strep throat and what can I do to get better?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Strep throat can be a real pain in the neck, err, throat, and the streptococcus bacteria is to blame. Streptococcus has hundreds of different strains that are organized into group A and group B. Group A strep (GAS), or streptococcus pyogenes, causes strep throat, as well as scarlet fever ^[2] and impetigo. This is a highly contagious bacteria, and in order to get better, seeing a health care provider for a diagnosis and appropriate treatment is recommended. This can help prevent it from turning to a more serious condition and reduce the spread to others.

So what might someone who has strep be feeling? Symptoms of strep throat include:

- Severe sore or itchy throat, often with white patches on the tonsils
- Fever
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck
- Headache
- Difficulty swallowing
- Nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain (common in children with the illness)
- Swollen tonsils
- Rashes

Strep throat is very contagious, so you might want to warn people you spend time with (e.g., roommates, friends, family, and coworkers) if you've recently received a positive diagnosis. Strep throat is spread through contact with mucus from the nose or throat of an infected individual is sprayed into the air through a cough or a sneeze and someone else breathes in the infected droplets. It's also possible to spread strep throat through shared personal items, food, or drinks, when the same secretions from an infected person end up in the mouth or nose of others. If you're vigilant about [handwashing](#) [3] and covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze, you'll reduce the risk of someone jumping down your throat for getting them sick.

Untreated strep may lead to more serious illnesses and infections such as kidney inflammation, scarlet fever, and rheumatic fever (which causes joint and heart inflammation). The good news is that the method of diagnosis is fairly uncomplicated; a health care provider can diagnose strep throat after taking a throat culture with a swab. If the test comes back positive, the most common treatment is antibiotics. After beginning treatment, symptoms generally begin to dissipate within one to two days and you're less likely to be contagious after 24 hours.

To avoid any complications, the full course of prescribed medication needs to be completed. While on meds, you can help relieve your symptoms by drinking lots of fluids, getting plenty of rest, and taking over-the-counter (OTC) pain reliever medications such as ibuprofen. Other ways to help you feel more comfortable include using a humidifier, eating soft foods (e.g., soups, applesauce, oatmeal, yogurt, scrambled eggs), and gargling one-quarter teaspoon of table salt mixed with eight ounces of warm water every few hours.

Feel better and hope your throat clears up soon!

Alice!

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