

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary Template

Title: Strep Throat: Do you really need to take medication to cure it?

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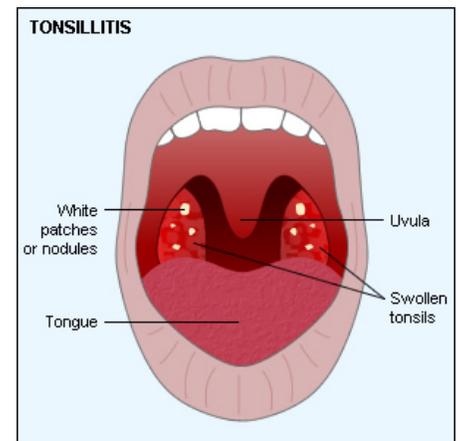
Plain Language Summary:

What is Strep Throat?

Strep throat is a type of acute pharyngitis. Pharyngitis is another word for sore throat. Acute pharyngitis simply means you have an infection in your throat that is causing it to hurt. There are many different “bugs” that can cause this infection. *Streptococcus*, the “bug” that causes Strep throat, is one of the most common.

What are the symptoms of Strep throat?

This infection causes a fever and a very sore throat. Some people may notice that their throat is red, swollen and has white spots on it. Many patients do not have a cough or a stuffy or runny nose. When you go to the doctor, the doctor will feel your neck and jaw to see if you have swollen lymph nodes. Lymph nodes are little balls that swell up when you have an infection because they are trying to get rid of the bug that is causing the infection.



How are Strep throat/acute pharyngitis diagnosed?

Sometimes a doctor will decide that you have this infection simply based upon your symptoms. Most of the time, the doctor will order a culture of your throat. This means someone will rub a big q-tip in the back of your throat. This is called a Rapid Strep Test. The purpose of this test is to try to collect some of the bugs that are causing the infection. The people in the lab are able to test the q-tip for these bugs. If the test comes back positive, it is almost certain that you have an infection.



What if the Rapid Strep Test comes back negative?

If your Rapid Strep Test comes back negative, you could still have an infection. The Rapid Strep Test only tests for the most common bugs that cause infection, such as *Strep*. If you have an infection caused by a rarer bug, the test will come back negative even though you actually have an infection. The doctor will decide if you should get treatment based upon your symptoms.

What is the treatment for Acute Pharyngitis?

The most common treatment is to take antibiotics for about a week. Antibiotics will help kill the “bugs” that are causing the throat infection. If you have a positive Rapid Strep Test, you will almost certainly get medication from the doctor. If you have a negative Rapid Strep Test, your treatment will depend on how bad your symptoms are. Probably, the doctor will tell you the names of some medicines you can buy at a local drug store.

These medicines will help ease some of your symptoms. S/he may also tell you to come back in a week if you still aren't feeling better.

Does everyone need antibiotic treatment?

There is no “yes” or “no” answer to this question. Doctors have different beliefs about who needs to be treated. Almost all doctors treat those who have a positive Rapid Strep Test. Most also treat adults who have symptoms of strep throat, but have a negative Rapid Strep Test. Then there are some doctors won't treat any adults, even if they have a positive Rapid Strep Test. The reason for this is that they believe there is no real advantage to treatment. Medication only shortens how long you are sick by 16 hours. Also, this infection used to cause bad heart and kidney diseases if it wasn't treated with medicine. Nowadays though, it is very rare to have such a serious side effect. What type of treatment you get will depend on your age, symptoms, and the belief of your doctor.

For More Information:

Medline Plus: Pharyngitis

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000655.htm>

UpToDate: Evaluation of Acute Pharyngitis in Adults

<http://www.uptodate.com/contents/evaluation-of-acute-pharyngitis-in-adults>

PubMed Health: Strep Throat

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001663/>

Key Words:

Acute Pharyngitis

Strep Throat

Rapid Strep Test

Treatment

Antibiotics

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