



ADVICE AND FACTS ABOUT ANTIBIOTICS AND INFECTIONS

Do you have a sore throat?

Regardless of whether they are caused by a virus or bacteria, most throat infections resolve within a week without treatment. If you have a sore throat along with a runny nose, hoarseness or coughing (sometimes fever), the cause is probably a common cold virus. Penicillin and other antibiotics do not have any effect on viral infections, so it is best to let your body heal itself. Sometimes your sore throat will last a week or so.

A sore throat and fever without a runny nose, hoarseness or coughing is called tonsillitis and may be caused by bacteria, particularly streptococci.

Mild tonsillitis is not helped by antibiotic therapy. If you have moderate to severe tonsillitis caused by streptococci, antibiotics are recommended. Antibiotics can shorten the time that you experience symptoms of severe tonsillitis by 2–3 days.

Can my doctor perform a test to see if antibiotics will help me?

If you have a sore throat without also having a cough, hoarseness or runny nose, and you have a fever above 38.5° C, swollen glands in the neck or white spots on your tonsils, there is about a 50 percent chance that the cause is a streptococci infection. Because you can't tell by simply looking if streptococci are the cause, your doctor can take a rapid throat culture and decide whether antibiotics will do you any good. A blood sample is not likely to provide the doctor with useful information.

Children, particularly those attending preschool, are often carriers of streptococci in the throat. That's why doctors do not take rapid throat cultures from children unless they exhibit clear signs of tonsillitis. A person who is merely a carrier of streptococci should not be treated with antibiotics.

Historically, tonsillitis caused by streptococci could lead to rheumatic fever and inflammation of the kidneys, but such conditions are extremely rare in Sweden today. That is why there is no longer any need to identify and treat every carrier of streptococci in the throat.

Antibiotic therapy

If antibiotics are called for, the preferred treatment is penicillin because it is highly effective against streptococci. After 2 to 3 days of antibiotic therapy, you will no longer be contagious.

Taking antibiotics when they aren't needed is a bad idea since they also affect the "good" bacteria in your body. Antibiotics can also have side effects, such as diarrhoea and skin rash. The use of antibiotics can also lead to bacterial resistance, which means that antibiotics won't have any effect when needed to fight serious infections.

Advice

- Throat lozenges and liquids can relieve symptoms of a sore throat
- Pain relievers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen may be helpful to alleviate pain
- Wash your hands often to avoid contagion

What to watch for

Contact your doctor again if you get worse or don't improve within 3 to 4 days, or if you have trouble opening your mouth wide or swallowing. You may have developed quinsy, which is a pus filled abscess near your tonsils.