

Sore Throats

Readers will know only too well that sore throats can be a bane of life for people with M.E. This may indicate a weakened immune system or low-grade infection, and it can go alongside enlarged lymph nodes in the neck or armpits, together with episodes of feverishness and aching joints.

WHAT CAUSES SORE THROATS?

Sore throats are, most often, caused by an **infection**. So normal hygiene precautions can help to avoid them – this means avoiding people who have colds when possible, and washing hands frequently, especially if you are the sort of person who touches your face a lot!

Underlying this, though, the problem can sometimes be triggered by **excess mucus accumulation in the sinuses**, which drips down into the throat ('post nasal drip'). The mucus is acidic and sometimes infected, and this causes the lining of the throat to become sore and painful. If the mucus is infected, the infection can colonise the throat and tonsils, making the inflammation worse so that swallowing becomes difficult. The infection is **most commonly a virus** and so antibiotics cannot remove it. However, sometimes the throat infection is bacterial rather than viral, and this should be seen by your doctor. It is advisable to go to your GP if you feel feverish and if the sore throat continues to cause pain and discomfort for more than a week.

If sinusitis is your problem, it is possible to improve this (see 'Sinusitis' information). What is not widely realised is that **chronic constipation** can be one of the causes of excess mucus discharge in the sinuses – if the bowels are not discharging toxins properly, the toxins are often reabsorbed and discharged into the sinuses. Chronic constipation often goes alongside some degree of sinus problems, which bring headaches in the area of the sinuses ('face ache').

Sore throats may also be the result of an **allergy** or irritant – in this case the throat is very dry and 'scratchy'. There are endless possible causes, but when the cause is found the best cure is avoidance. Dust (and what lives in the dust!) is a common cause so a good vacuum cleaner is advisable.

The post nasal drip may cause another problem that people with M.E. recognise, which is equally distressing. As the mucus drips into the throat, you have to swallow frequently so that it doesn't go into the windpipe – so the **muscles and ligaments** of the mouth and throat become overstrained, causing constant pain (virtually, repetitive strain injury of the throat!)

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP?

Get rid of constipation If you are constipated make sure you are drinking plenty of water (drink it warm when you have a sore throat) and that your diet includes whatever form of vegetable fibre you are comfortable with. Figs, prunes, spinach and beetroot are recommended.

Avoid things which irritate the throat even if they seem to bring temporary relief. These include chilled drinks and foods, hot spicy foods and fried foods and crisps.

Tired throat muscles If your muscles are literally sore and tired from all that swallowing, you can feel this yourself because they will be sore to the touch (from the outside!) Try gently massaging in a healing balm from a herbalist two or three times a day. Arnica balm (available from herbalist and health food shops) or a safe carrier oil or cream with a drop of peppermint oil mixed in, would be suitable for this.

TRADITIONAL REMEDIES

Honey and lemon are the traditional soothers for sore throats, and nothing can beat a home made drink of warm lemon and honey.

Gargle with a teaspoon of vinegar in a glass of warm water.

Gargle with warm salt water three times a day. (don't swallow!)

Garlic is one of the best natural cleansers and acts against both bacteria and viruses. The raw juice is the most powerful agent, and if you can take a little of this mixed with honey and lemon you then have a very effective natural remedy.

Propolis is a substance made by bees and is a natural antiseptic which some people find helps with sore throats and colds. (Some M.E. sufferers have also found that their energy is boosted by taking propolis on a regular basis.) It can be bought from a health food shop under various brand names.

Recipe for Sore Throat Remedy

Combine equal quantities of glycerine (available from chemist), honey and fresh squeezed lemon juice. Store in a bottle and take 1 teaspoon frequently



FROM THE CHEMIST

Throat pastilles, often based on lemon and honey and other traditional ingredients, are widely available. You can even buy over-the-counter lozenges which have a local anaesthetic action aimed at numbing the painful area. Treat these with caution and bear in mind that they numb the tongue as well as the throat.

Herbal pastilles Ricola blackcurrant Swiss herbal lozenges are sugar-free and soothing (however they do contain aspartame). Sucking Solgar Flavo-zinc lozenges may also help fight the infection.

Aspirin Gargle Dissolve a soluble aspirin in a glass of warm water. Gargle with it and swallow it down. This should not be used for children nor, of course, if you are intolerant of aspirin.

Throat sprays are very effective, and contain numbing local anaesthetics. They are particularly effective as the spray action goes right to the back of the throat, where it is needed. Follow the instructions carefully and, as always, start with the smallest amount. Be careful after using a spray that you don't burn your throat with a hot drink.

Don't forget that, as with any persistent health problem, your GP should be notified of this very troubling problem if it goes on for more than a couple of weeks. Even if s/he cannot make any suggestions other than the above, this will enable your general health to be monitored.