UPPER RESPIRATORY TRACT INFECTIONS
Getting the right relief

DID YOU KNOW?

Most people with colds, sore throats, earaches and coughs don’t need antibiotics to feel better

Antibiotics only kill bacteria
NOT the viruses that cause most colds and 90% of sore throats in adults

Antibiotics destroy GOOD and BAD bacteria;
and may cause diarrhoea, thrush or rash

Antibiotics do not treat viruses; patients should get better without antibiotics

Antibiotic resistance
People taking too many antibiotics today may cause antibiotics not to work in the future

Your symptoms should clear up within 1–2 weeks or even sooner

Antibiotics will NOT make you feel better sooner and will NOT stop the symptoms of a viral infection

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What are your symptoms?

Blocked/ runny nose
Earache
Sinus pain
Cold & flu
Throat pain
Dry/tickly cough

What kind of advice would you like?
Pain relief ✔ Reassurance ✔ Information on duration ✔

Many different types of products are available to relieve your symptoms – what kind of product do you prefer?

Lozenges
Sprays
Gargles
Tablets
Solubles
Syrups
Drops

If symptoms last longer than normal, do not improve or you develop new symptoms come back and see me
TALKING TO PATIENTS ABOUT URTIs

MYTH

“Patients consulting for a URTI want an antibiotic”

FACT

Most patients seek a diagnosis, reassurance on the seriousness of their condition, guidance on duration of symptoms and relief from the most bothersome symptoms.

Use the following 3 STEP APPROACH when a patient consults with a URTI

The 3 step approach is outlined below using sore throat as an example:

1. Address patient’s concerns

- Assess their needs, primary concern(s) and expectations
- Empathise – sore throats can be worrying and bothersome for patients

2. Be vigilant – assess severity

- Most sore throats are viral infections and are self-limiting. Complications are rare, but may be experienced in high-risk patients or patients with a bacterial infection (e.g. Strep A).
- High-risk patients include the elderly (>65 years), young children (<2 years or born prematurely), immunocompromised patients, people with pre-existing medical conditions (e.g. diabetes, asthma, HIV, COPD), high-risk populations (e.g. Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders in Australia, American Indians or Alaskan natives) or those who appear seriously unwell.
- The Center criteria assess the likelihood of a Strep A bacterial infection (high temperature, absence of a cough, swollen glands in the neck, swollen/red tonsils with exudate).
- However, it is often difficult to distinguish between a viral or bacterial infection based on these symptoms alone.

3. Counsel patients on effective relief of symptoms

- Provide reassurance of the non-serious nature of the infection and likely duration of symptoms
- Explain why antibiotics are not needed – use information leaflet
- Discuss the importance of symptomatic relief, reducing inflammation and how it will make your patient feel better

“Your sore throat symptoms should clear up within a week, or sooner, without antibiotics – your immune system can deal with this infection.”

“My son does indeed seem unhappy. The good news is I’ve examined him and he has no signs of serious infection. I recommend we focus on solutions that will best relieve his symptoms and make him more comfortable. So I am starting with a course of pain relievers for children. Of course, if he is not better within one week – or if the symptoms do not improve – book an immediate appointment with me.”

“Your son does not improve – book an appointment with me.”

“Looking at your throat I can see it is quite inflamed but there are no signs of serious infection. You probably have a virus that should clear within one week or so. I am going to recommend an anti-inflammatory. These are available in a number of formats, and I will help you choose the right tablet, spray or lozenge, which meets your individual preferences and helps with the pain and discomfort. Antibiotics won’t relieve your pain or make you better any sooner in this case. Please come back to see me if your symptoms do not improve.”

“I can see your sore throat does look painful. As you are healthy, this infection is not something to worry about. I am not going to prescribe you antibiotics today as they won’t help you feel better any sooner. Antibiotics have side effects and there is a risk they will not work for you in the future anymore. The good news is that we can give you the relief you need now. Let’s look at what symptoms are affecting you most and how I can help. Come back to me if your symptoms persist or do not improve.”

“Hello, how can I help you today?”

“It sounds like that is painful/uncomfortable for you”

“How do you think I can help/what would you like me to do for you?”

“Your symptoms persist or do not improve.”

“Hello, how can I help you?”

“It sounds like that is painful/uncomfortable for you”

“How do you think I can help/what would you like me to do for you?”

“I think I need antibiotics for my painful sore throat.”

“This is the worst sore throat I have ever had. I am worried it could be something serious.”

“My son has a sore throat. He is unhappy and I want him to feel better quickly.”

Red flag symptoms that require immediate medical investigation:

- long symptom duration
- worsening of symptoms
- coughing up blood
- shortness of breath
- unilateral neck swelling (unrelated to lymph nodes)
- great difficulty swallowing food or drink
- very high temperature
- night sweats
- drooling or muffled voice
- wheezing sounds when breathing

Developed by the Global Respiratory Infection Partnership (GRIP) – an international group of healthcare professionals committed to reducing inappropriate antibiotic use for RTIs in primary care and the wider community, helping to counteract antibiotic resistance.

References:


