

COMMON INFECTIONS OF THE UPPER RESPIRATORY TRACT

Common infections of the upper respiratory tract are pharyngitis, tonsillitis, laryngitis, rhinitis, sinusitis, otitis externa, and otitis media.

Pharyngitis is an infection of the throat. Often the “sore throat” includes the tonsils as well. Though most of the cases are viral and do not respond to antibiotics, about 15% are due to streptococci (“strep throat”) and produce fever, severe sore throat, difficulty swallowing, exudate, swollen neck glands, and weakness. This infection is treated with antibiotics (generally penicillin or erythromycin in penicillin - allergic patients). The exudate of infectious mononucleosis can mimic “strep throat” and the diagnosis is made by throat culture and monospot test. Mild viral sore throats should be treated symptomatically with gargles, anti-inflammatories (ibuprofen or acetaminaphen) and occasionally antihistamines.

Laryngitis (inflammation of the voice box) is characterized by hoarseness or loss of voice. Most cases are viral and are treated as for viral pharyngitis, and voice rest. Oftentimes these common upper respiratory infections co-exist.

Rhinitis is an infection of the lining of the nose, most commonly due to respiratory viruses. In addition, allergies can play an important role in rhinitis, causing sneezing, stuffy & runny noses, itching of the nasal passages and eyes, and tearing. Antihistamines can be quite helpful.

Sinusitis is a common problem. Associated infection of the upper respiratory tract is usually the precursor. Symptoms include purulent nasal or postnasal drainage, stuffy nose and pain &/or pressure of the involved sinuses. Antibiotics, nasal decongestants and antihistamines are often indicated.

Otitis Externa is an infection of the external auditory canal, often called “swimmer’s ear”.It occurs mostly in the summer and is characterized by pain and swelling of the external ear canal. Treatment consists of cleansing the ear with alcohol – acetic acid mixtures and topical antibiotics.

Otitis Media is an infection of the middle ear which often results when the eustachian tube connecting the nasopharynx becomes blocked. Fluid collects in the middle ear and provides a culture media for bacteria. Symptoms include severe pain, fever and decreased hearing. Treatment with appropriate antibiotics is indicated, but antihistamines usually are not helpful.

We at the Health Center will be happy to help you.



Healthfully yours,

Dr. Healthberry

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