Pharyngitis / Tonsillitis

What is pharyngitis and tonsillitis?
Pharyngitis and tonsillitis are infections in the throat that cause inflammation. If the tonsils are primarily affected, it is called tonsillitis. If the throat is primarily affected, it is called pharyngitis. A person might even have inflammation and infection of both the tonsils and the throat. This would be called pharyngotonsillitis. These infections are spread by close contact with other individuals. Bacterial infections are more common during the winter. Viral infections are more common in summer and fall.

What causes pharyngitis and tonsillitis?
There are many causes of infections in the throat. The following are the most common:

- viruses - this infection is the most common in all age groups, and may include:
  - Adenovirus
  - Influenza virus
  - Epstein-Barr virus
  - Herpes simplex virus
- bacteria
  - Group A Beta Hemolytic Streptococci (GABHS)
  - Neisseria Gonorrhea
  - Hemophilus Influenza Type B
  - Mycoplasma
- fungal infections
- parasitic infections
- cigarette smoke
- other causes

What are the symptoms of pharyngitis and tonsillitis?
The symptoms of pharyngitis and tonsillitis depend greatly on the cause of the infection and the person affected. For some people, the onset of symptoms may be quick; for others, symptom onset is slow. The following are the most common symptoms of pharyngitis and tonsillitis. However, each individual may experience symptoms differently. Symptoms may include:

- sore throat
- fever - either low grade or high
- headache
- decrease in appetite
- not feeling well
- nausea
- vomiting
- stomach aches
- painful swallowing
- visual redness or drainage in the throat

The symptoms of pharyngitis and tonsillitis may resemble other medical conditions or problems. Always consult your physician for a diagnosis.
**How are pharyngitis and tonsillitis diagnosed?**

In most cases, it is hard to distinguish between a viral sore throat and a strep throat based on physical examination. It is important, though, to know if the sore throat is caused by GABHS, as this requires antibiotic treatment to help prevent the complications that can occur with these bacteria.

As a result, most people, when they have the above symptoms, will receive a strep test and throat culture to determine if it is an infection caused by GABHS. This usually involves a quick throat swab in the physician's office.

Quick tests, called rapid strep tests, may be performed. This may also immediately become positive for GABHS and antibiotics will be started. If it is negative, part of the throat swab will be kept for a throat culture. This will further identify, in two to three days, if there is any GABHS present. Your physician will decide the treatment plan based on the findings.

**Treatment for pharyngitis and tonsillitis:**

Specific treatment for pharyngitis and tonsillitis will be determined by your physician based on:

- your age, overall health, and medical history
- extent of the condition
- cause of the condition
- your tolerance for specific medications, procedures, or therapies
- expectations for the course of the condition
- your opinion or preference

If bacteria is not the cause of the infection, then the treatment is usually directed more for comfort. Antibiotics will not help treat viral sore throats. Treatment may include:

- acetaminophen (for pain)
- increased fluid intake
- throat lozenges
- antibiotics (if the cause of the infection is bacterial, not viral)