

20 Natural Remedies to Soothe a Sore Throat

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Sore throat, or pharyngitis, causes pain and irritation in the throat, making swallowing and talking uncomfortable. It's commonly caused by viral infections like colds or flu, but can also result from bacterial infections, allergens, irritants, or acid reflux
- › While most sore throats resolve on their own within a week, there are natural strategies to soothe your throat, reduce inflammation and support your immune system
- › Raw honey, saltwater gargle, apple cider vinegar, peppermint tea, marshmallow root and slippery elm have various therapeutic properties to provide relief from discomfort and help manage symptoms
- › Additional strategies for relief include steam inhalation to moisturize throat tissues, acupuncture to reduce the frequency and severity of sore throat and adequate rest to support immune function
- › Prevention is better than cure. Tips to support your immune system and reduce your risk for sore throat are included below

Sore throat, or pharyngitis, is a common condition that causes pain, irritation or scratchiness in the throat, making it uncomfortable to swallow or talk.¹ Most cases of sore throat in adults (50% to 90%) and children (70%) are associated with viral respiratory infections like the common cold or flu.²

However, bacterial infections like strep throat, environmental allergens and irritants, and acid reflux can also cause this condition. If your sore throat is caused by an infection,

you may experience additional symptoms like swollen lymph nodes, fever, cough, body aches, headaches, inflamed tonsils and nausea or vomiting.³

While most sore throats resolve on their own within a week, they can be quite uncomfortable and disruptive to daily life. The good news is, there are natural strategies to soothe your throat, reduce inflammation and support your immune system.

20 Natural Sore Throat Remedies

Instead of reaching for over-the-counter medicines to relieve the symptoms of sore throat, try the following natural remedies:^{4,5}

1. **Raw honey** – Raw, unfiltered honey is rich in flavonoids with antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties.⁶ Its viscous consistency also allows it to coat the throat, forming a protective layer that may help soothe irritation and make it easier for you to swallow.

A study published in *BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine*⁷ highlights honey's ability to help reduce the frequency and severity of the symptoms of upper respiratory tract infection, presenting it as a viable alternative to antibiotics that could help combat antimicrobial resistance.

To use honey for sore throat relief, you can take it straight off the spoon, mix it into warm water or tea, or use it as a sweetener in other soothing drinks. You can also mix it with lemon water and use it for gargling. Research⁸ shows this mixture is effective in helping reduce sore throat, cough and hoarseness.

Keep in mind that most jars of honey found in supermarkets are adulterated, so make sure the product you're buying is real, raw and unfiltered. Learn how to tell if you're getting real honey in my article, "[Honey Laundering: Is Your Honey Real or Fake?](#)"

2. **Saltwater gargle** – Gargling with warm salt water has long been recommended for relieving sore throat. This simple solution works by drawing out excess fluid from

inflamed tissues in the throat, reducing swelling and providing relief.⁹ The minerals in the salt also have antimicrobial properties that may help fight off infections.¹⁰

To prepare a saltwater gargle, simply dissolve half a teaspoon of salt in a cup of water. It's ideal to use warm water, as it helps the salt dissolve more easily and provides additional soothing effects. Gargle with this solution for about 30 seconds, then spit it out. Repeat this several times a day.¹¹

- 3. Apple cider vinegar (ACV)** – ACV contains acetic acid, which has potent antimicrobial properties that may help combat the bacteria or viruses causing your sore throat.¹² It also helps support your immune health by improving your gut microbiome.¹³

To use ACV, mix 1 teaspoon with 8 ounces of water and a teaspoon of salt. Gargle with this solution or use it as a throat spray. For a soothing drink, dilute a tablespoon of ACV in warm water; adding a tablespoon of honey can enhance the flavor.

- 4. Peppermint** – Menthol, the active ingredient in peppermint, provides a cooling sensation that can help numb and soothe the pain caused by a sore throat. It also acts as a decongestant, helping to thin mucus. This can be particularly beneficial if your sore throat is accompanied by congestion or a cough. The herb also has anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and antiviral properties that may contribute to healing.^{14,15}

There are several ways to use peppermint for sore throat relief. Peppermint tea is a popular choice – simply steep fresh peppermint leaves or a peppermint tea bag in hot water for several minutes, then sip slowly. You can also add a few drops of peppermint essential oil to a diffuser or a bowl of hot water for steam inhalation.

- 5. Marshmallow root** – Marshmallow root, derived from the *Althaea officinalis* plant, exerts various pharmacological effects that may be beneficial for managing sore throat, including antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, soothing, demulcent and antitussive properties.¹⁶ Its mucilage content forms a gel-like consistency when

combined with water, creating a protective coating that soothes the throat and eases irritation and inflammation.¹⁷

To use marshmallow root, you can steep 1 to 2 tablespoons of the dried root in a cup of hot water for about 10 minutes; strain the mixture and drink it slowly. It's important to note that while marshmallow root is generally safe, it can interact with certain medications. If you're taking any prescription drugs, especially diabetes medications, consult with your healthcare provider before using marshmallow root.¹⁸

- 6. Slippery elm** – Derived from the inner bark of the slippery elm tree, this herbal remedy coats the throat with mucilage, helping soothe soreness. It also has anti-inflammatory, antiviral, expectorant and immunostimulant properties,¹⁹ and has long been used for relief from symptoms of the common cold, flu and gastrointestinal issues.²⁰

You can consume slippery elm as a tea; simply mix the powdered bark in hot water until mucilage forms. It's also available as lozenges.

- 7. Garlic** – Garlic has been prized for its medicinal properties for thousands of years. Its active compound, allicin, may help fight off bacteria and viruses. Garlic also has antiseptic and anti-inflammatory effects that may help reduce swelling and irritation.^{21,22}

There are several ways to use garlic for a sore throat. One method is to chew a raw garlic clove, although the taste can be quite intense. A milder approach is to crush a few cloves of garlic and steep them in hot water to make tea. Adding honey can help make this more palatable and provide additional soothing effects.

- 8. Chamomile tea** – Chamomile is known for its soothing and anti-inflammatory properties, which are attributed to compounds like chamazulene and apigenin. These substances can help reduce swelling in the throat and alleviate pain. Additionally, chamomile has mild astringent properties that can help shrink swollen tissue in the throat.²³

Drinking chamomile tea also provides overall relaxation, which can be beneficial whenever you're feeling under the weather. The warm liquid itself is soothing to a sore throat, and the steam from the hot tea can help keep nasal passages clear. To make chamomile tea, simply steep the tea bag or loose dried chamomile flowers in hot water for about 10 minutes.

- 9. Ginger** — Ginger is one of the most popular remedies for sore throat. It has potent antibacterial, antiviral, anti-inflammatory, analgesic and antioxidant properties that may help combat infections and alleviate pain.²⁴

A study published in the International Journal of Basic and Clinical Pharmacology²⁵ found that drinking ginger tea three to four times a day is effective for relieving sore throat as well as nonstop coughing and congestion.

To make ginger tea. Slice a few pieces of fresh ginger root and steep them in hot water for about 10 minutes. You can add honey and lemon for additional benefits and improved taste.

- 10. Turmeric** — Turmeric, a bright yellow spice commonly used in Indian cuisine, has powerful anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial and antioxidant properties. Its bioactive compound curcumin is responsible for most of its health benefits, including its ability to help reduce throat swelling and irritation.²⁶

There are many ways to incorporate turmeric into your diet. One popular way is by making turmeric tea. Mix a teaspoon of turmeric powder into warm milk or hot water and add a pinch of black pepper to enhance curcumin absorption.²⁷ Another option is to gargle with a turmeric solution. Mix half a teaspoon of turmeric and half a teaspoon of salt in a cup of warm water. Gargle with this solution several times a day.

- 11. Licorice root** — Licorice root has a long history of use for various upper respiratory conditions, including cough, colds and bronchitis.²⁸ Its anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, demulcent and expectorant effects make it particularly beneficial for

sore throat relief. One of its key compounds, glycyrrhizin, has also been shown to have antiviral properties.^{29,30}

Licorice root can be consumed in various forms. It's available as tea, tinctures, extracts and lozenges. Some people also chew on licorice root. You can mix its extract in warm water and use the solution for gargling as well.

12. Oil of oregano – This oil has strong antibacterial properties against several species, including *Bacillus subtilis*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Pseudomonas* and *E. coli*.³¹ A study published in *Acta Medica Philippina*³² found that oregano leaf extract helps fight against pathogens that infect the throat, such as *Streptococcus pyogenes* and *Candida albicans*.

Keep in mind that the oil of oregano differs from oregano essential oil. Oil of oregano is an herbal extract, while oregano essential oil is a much more concentrated oil that's extracted through steam distillation. Oil of oregano is suitable for internal use when properly diluted.

To use oil of oregano for sore throat, dilute a few drops in a glass of warm water and gargle with this solution several times a day. You can also dilute it with a carrier oil, like coconut oil, and apply it topically to the throat area.³³

13. Fenugreek seeds – Similar to marshmallow root and slippery elm, fenugreek seeds impart soothing effects by coating the throat with gel-like mucilage. A 2023 study published in *Cureus*³⁴ found that fenugreek gel exerts more potent antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory effects against oral microbes than doxycycline and aspirin.

Another article published in the *Research Journal of Medicinal Plants in Ayurveda*³⁵ suggests gargling with fenugreek seeds twice to thrice a day to address chronic sore throat. To make the solution, mix 2 tablespoons of fenugreek seeds into a quart of water and let it simmer for 30 minutes over a low flame. Once it has cooled down, strain the solution and use it for gargling.

- 14. Throat coat tea** – Throat Coat tea³⁶ is a commercial herbal tea blend that specifically targets sore throats by combining mucilage-rich ingredients such as slippery elm bark, marshmallow root, licorice root and wild cherry bark. You can easily make a homemade version by steeping equal parts of these herbs in hot water for 10 to 15 minutes.
- 15. Sage and echinacea throat spray** – Sage has been used for centuries in traditional medicine for its antiseptic, antibacterial and astringent properties,³⁷ while echinacea is known for its immune-boosting effects.³⁸ When combined in a throat spray, these herbs provide a convenient and effective way to ease sore throat.
- According to a study published in *Complementary Medicine Research*,³⁹ both sage and echinacea "represent a valuable and safe option for the early treatment of acute sore throats capable to alleviate symptoms and contribute to reducing viral loads in the throat."
- 16. Warm liquids** – Warm soups and broths have long been go-to remedies for relieving sore throats and easing the discomfort that comes with colds and flu. There are several reasons why they can be beneficial when you're feeling under the weather.
- The warm liquid helps soothe the throat and can provide immediate relief from pain and irritation. It also provides nutrition to support your body's recovery process. Meanwhile, the steam helps clear your nasal passages, which is particularly helpful if your sore throat is accompanied by congestion.⁴⁰
- 17. Frozen foods** – While it might seem counterintuitive, certain frozen foods can provide relief for a sore throat. The cold temperature can help numb the pain and reduce inflammation in the throat tissues. This can be particularly soothing if your throat feels raw or burning.⁴¹ Frozen grass fed yogurt is a good choice, as it gives you the added benefit of probiotics. You can also try sucking on ice for relief.
- 18. Baking soda** – Baking soda, also known as sodium bicarbonate, is a common household item with myriad uses. Its alkaline nature may help neutralize acids in

the throat and stomach, soothing irritation. It also has antibacterial properties and may help inhibit the growth of yeast and fungi.⁴²

To make a baking soda gargle, mix one-quarter to half a teaspoon of baking soda in a glass of warm water. Gargle with this solution every few hours. Make sure to spit out the solution after gargling, do not swallow, and rinse your mouth with plain water.

19. Zinc lozenges – As far back as 1984, results from a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial⁴³ showed that zinc lozenges shortened the common cold. Further study⁴⁴ demonstrated it could reduce the length of your cold by an average of 33%. Zinc lozenges are most effective when started in the first 24 hours you experience symptoms.⁴⁵

Research shows zinc acetate and zinc gluconate are effective for the common cold.⁴⁶ However, make sure not to take citric acid, tartaric acid and mannitol/sorbitol sweeteners with zinc as they interfere with the release of the nutrient in your body.⁴⁷

20. Hydrogen peroxide – One of my favorite treatments for upper respiratory viruses is nebulized hydrogen peroxide. The treatment is simple and effectively helps kill the virus in your respiratory tract. This video demonstrates how to administer the treatment, which must use food-grade hydrogen peroxide and not the product you purchase in the grocery store.

Additional Strategies for Sore Throat Relief

In addition to the remedies mentioned above, here are other strategies you can adopt to alleviate sore throat discomfort and promote faster healing:

- **Steam inhalation** – If your sore throat is caused by dryness or congestion, the warm, moist air can help rehydrate and soothe your irritated throat tissues and loosen mucus, making it easier to expel. It also helps increase the blood circulation in your throat area, promoting healing and helping reduce inflammation.⁴⁸

To practice steam inhalation, boil water and carefully pour it into a large bowl. Lean over the bowl, keep your face at a comfortable distance and drape a towel over your head to trap the steam. Breathe deeply for about 10 to 15 minutes. Repeat twice a day.⁴⁹ You can enhance the effects by adding a few drops of essential oils like eucalyptus or peppermint to the water.

- **Acupuncture** — Acupuncture, a key component of traditional Chinese medicine, involves inserting thin needles into specific points on the body. Though it may not be the first remedy you consider for a sore throat, studies have shown it can effectively help reduce the frequency and severity of sore throats caused by various factors, including post-surgical recovery⁵⁰ and COVID-related symptoms.⁵¹
- **Rest** — Giving your body adequate rest is crucial when recovering from any illness, as it allows your immune system to focus its energy on fighting off the infection or inflammation causing your symptoms. When you're resting, try to keep your head elevated to reduce postnasal drip,⁵² which can exacerbate throat irritation.

Prevention Is Your Best Option

While natural remedies can provide significant relief from sore throat symptoms, preventing it from occurring in the first place is always preferable. Here are some tips to help reduce your risk:

- **Exercise regularly** — Regular physical activity can boost your immune system, helping your body fight off infections that can cause sore throat.⁵³ I recommend doing moderate exercises such as [walking](#), as they cannot be overdone.
- **Get enough high-quality sleep** — Sleep is essential for maintaining a strong immune system.⁵⁴ Aim for seven to nine hours of sleep every night. Create a relaxing bedtime routine and ensure your sleeping environment is dark, quiet and cool. Avoid electronic screens for at least an hour before bed, as the blue light can interfere with your sleep cycle.

- **Optimize your vitamin D levels** – Sunlight is the best source of vitamin D. However, if you've consumed a diet high in seed oils (rich in [linoleic acid](#)), be cautious with sun exposure. These oils migrate to your skin cells, where they oxidize when exposed to sunlight, potentially causing inflammation and DNA damage.

As a result, you're far more prone to sunburn when you're on a high-LA diet.

Gradually increase sun exposure as you reduce your vegetable oil or LA intake.

- **Practice good hygiene** – Proper hand hygiene is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of infections that can cause sore throats, especially during cold and flu season. The video below demonstrates how to properly wash your hands.

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