

Sore or Irritated Throat

Certain types of cancer, some chemotherapy agents, or radiation therapy to the head, neck, or chest area can make your throat sore. Heartburn and gastric reflux can also cause a sore throat. Use the tips in this handout to help your throat heal and feel better.

Food Choices to Manage a Sore Throat

- Eat foods that are bland, semi-solid or soft, and easy to swallow. Cream soups, cheeses, mashed potatoes, yogurt, eggs, custards, puddings, cooked cereals, ice cream, casseroles, gravies, shakes, and smoothies are good choices.
- Make smoothies with soothing fruits such as melons, bananas, and peaches. Add yogurt, frozen yogurt, milk, ice cream, or silken tofu for extra protein.
- Choose soothing room-temperature or cool foods. Very cold foods or very hot foods can irritate your throat.
- Eat several small meals a day rather than three large ones. Space the meals about 2 to 3 hours apart to get the most comfort.
- Do not drink alcoholic beverages.
- Ask your health care provider whether a nutritional supplement, such as liquid meal replacements, would be helpful for you. Your registered dietitian (RD) may have samples and suggestions about which supplements would be best for you.

- Avoid foods that are likely to irritate your throat, including:
 - Tart or acidic beverages and foods, such as citrus fruit juices (grapefruit, orange, lemon, and lime), pickled and vinegary foods (relishes and pickles), and tomato-based foods (chili, salsa, pasta sauces, and pizza).
 - Salty foods, such as some canned broths and dry soup mixes.
 - Coarse or rough-textured foods, such as dry toast, granola, and raw fruits and vegetables. (Blend or moisten foods that are dry and solid.)
 - Strong or spicy flavorings, such as chili powder, cloves, curry, hot sauces, nutmeg, and peppers.
- Use the chart at the end of this handout to help you plan meals and snacks.

Other Tips to Help Your Throat Heal

- Take small bites, chew your food well, and swallow carefully. Allow ample time between bites.
- If gastric reflux or heartburn is a problem, stop eating 2 to 3 hours before bed and sleep with your head propped up.
- Do not use tobacco products or commercial mouthwashes that contain alcohol.
- Talk to your doctor about medications that can numb and soothe your mouth or throat.

Recommended Foods and Foods to Avoid for a Sore Throat

Food Group	Recommended Foods	Foods to Avoid
High-protein foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft, bland meats • Soft, bland casseroles, such as chicken rice casserole, macaroni and cheese, and tuna noodle casserole • Homemade cream soups • Pasteurized eggnog • Milk • Milkshakes • Silken tofu • Creamy nut butters • Cooked dried beans and peas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spicy dishes, such as spaghetti, tacos, and chili • Whole meats
Grain foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moistened bread • Cooked cereals • Cold cereals with milk • Pasta and rice in sauce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dry toast • Toasted English muffins • Hard bagels • Crackers • Crusty breads • Salted rolls • Pretzels and snack chips • Popcorn
Fruits and vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft, nonacidic fruit and vegetables as tolerated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citrus fruits • Raw vegetables • Tomatoes and tomato-containing products • Pickled fruits and vegetables • Potato chips

Continues

Recommended Foods and Foods to Avoid for a Sore Throat *(continued)*

Food Group	Recommended Foods	Foods to Avoid
Beverages, desserts, and other foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonacidic juices, such as apple juice, and nectars • Decaffeinated coffee and tea • Caffeine-free soft drinks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citrus juices • Tomato juice • Caffeinated beverages • Alcoholic beverages
Desserts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pudding, custard, cake, and cookies made without chocolate, as tolerated • Pie • Gelatin • Fruit smoothies • Ice cream, and sherbet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chocolate desserts
Other foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vinegar • Spices