

### 'A word of Advice'

If your GP has prescribed antibiotics take them as directed and make sure to finish the course. Antibiotic resistance is much more likely to develop if antibiotics are not taken as directed.

We can reassure you that your GP will prescribe antibiotics when you need them.

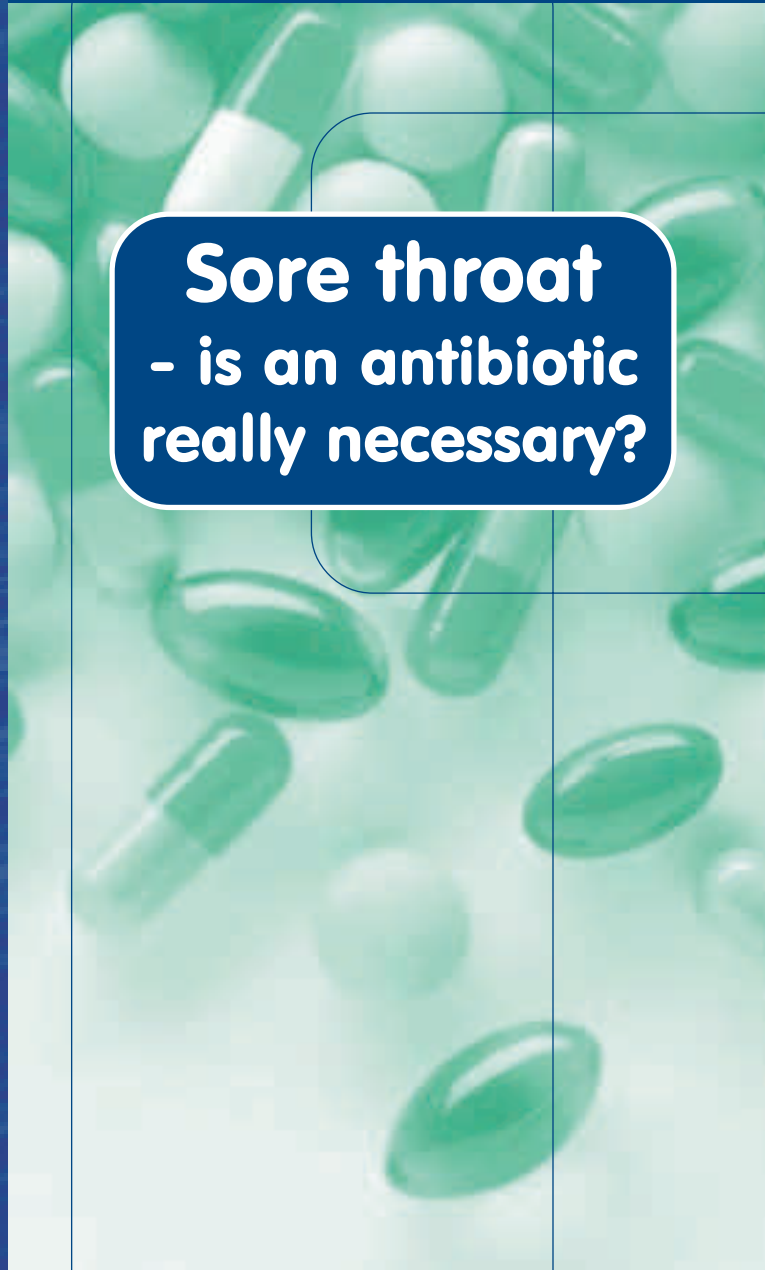
By using antibiotics only when you need them they are much more likely to help you.

- Antibiotics are becoming less effective at fighting infections.
- Many infections get better without antibiotics – sore throats are a good example of this.
- Regular paracetamol or ibuprofen can help to reduce pain and fever.
- You can get helpful advice from your community pharmacist.
- If you develop any new or worsening symptoms contact your doctor.

**Developed from initial work by East Lothian LHCC.**

Designed by the Social Inclusion & Community Care Directorate of **Lothian NHS Board.**

Adapted by **NHS Borders** with Lothian Health Board's permission



**Sore throat  
- is an antibiotic  
really necessary?**

Many infections get better without antibiotics – sore throats are a good example of this.

## Background information

Antibiotics are very important medicines.

Viral infections are much more common than bacterial infections, examples of problems caused by viruses include all colds and flu, most sore throats and many coughs.

Antibiotics help us fight infections caused by bacteria, they don't work at all in those caused by viruses.

We are finding that some bacteria can survive the effects of antibiotics – they become resistant, and antibiotics no longer work against these bacteria. The more we use antibiotics, the more likely it is that bacteria will develop resistance. This means that antibiotics are becoming less effective at fighting infections. Antibiotics may also cause unpleasant side effects.

We can't stop resistance developing but we can do a lot to slow it down and

stop it spreading simply by not using antibiotics when we don't need them. We now know that many infections get better just as quickly without antibiotics. A good example of this is a sore throat.

## What Do We Know?

Sore throat (or pharyngitis) is very common and is usually caused by a viral infection.

A sore throat can also lead to cough, fever, swollen glands in the neck and a hoarse voice (laryngitis).

Symptoms can take up to a week or so to clear.

Tonsillitis is an infection of the tonsils at the back of the mouth and again can be caused by viruses.

Symptoms are similar to a sore throat but may be more severe.

### Do I need an antibiotic? .....

The simple answer is usually not.

Whilst some throat and tonsil infections are caused by bacteria, most are caused by viruses and antibiotics will not help.

Even if bacteria *are* the cause of a throat infection, antibiotics will make little difference as the body's immune system may fight off the infection.

For people who are vulnerable to recurrent infections for other reasons ( for example if you have had your spleen removed), antibiotics can be very useful. Your GP will know your previous medical history and will make a decision to prescribe based on this.

### What can I do ...?

- Have plenty to drink! It can be tempting not to drink if swallowing is painful, but keeping hydrated is very important.
- Regular paracetamol or ibuprofen can help to reduce pain and fever.
- Soluble aspirin may ease the pain of a sore throat. Note - aspirin should not be given to children under 16 years
- Before taking check with your GP or Community Pharmacist if on other medication
- Remember your community pharmacist may be able to give you helpful advice on your symptoms.

**We also recommend that smokers stop smoking for the benefit of themselves and others.**

