

Will these two home remedies help your sore throat?

December 18 2017, by Dennis Thompson, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—Down go another two worthless home remedies for strep

throat.

Neither sugarless gum nor probiotics help to treat the symptoms or speed up recovery from a sore throat caused by bacterial infection, a new clinical trial reports.

Doctors had thought that gum sweetened by xylitol, a sugar substitute, might coat the throat and prevent the spread of strep bugs, said lead researcher Michael Moore of the University of Southampton in England.

And some doctors thought probiotics could stimulate the immune system and crowd out harmful strep bacteria, he added.

Probiotics, some suggested, might even help fend off viral infections that cause sore throat, said Moore, a professor of primary health care research.

But his team found no significant benefit from either in a four-year clinical trial involving almost 700 people suffering from sore throat.

Folks with strep should stick with proven remedies to ease their pain, Moore concluded.

"Simple painkillers taken by mouth or medicated lozenges that are anesthetic and antiseptic can provide some short-term symptom relief," Moore said.

Most [sore throats](#) are caused by viruses. But about 20 percent are caused by bacteria, most often streptococcus, Moore said.

Only a laboratory test can confirm strep throat, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But antibiotics are frequently overused to treat sore throat. About 70 percent of sore throat patients receive antibiotics, even though these drugs do nothing to treat a viral infection and aren't effective in soothing strep soreness, according to the Infectious Diseases Society of America.

Concerns about increasing antibiotic resistance led Moore and his team to test these two home remedies.

Clinical trial participants were divided into two groups, one testing the usefulness of gum and the other testing probiotics. Probiotics are good bacteria thought to have health benefits.

Gum chewers were given sticks sweetened with either xylitol (a birch sugar) or sorbitol, or told not to chew gum.

Xylitol has been shown to inhibit bacterial growth and coat the throat wall; the sweetener sorbitol has no such effect, but was included to test whether simply generating more saliva would help soothe the throat.

The probiotic group was provided capsules that contained either actual probiotics or a placebo.

The upshot: Neither xylitol gum nor [probiotics](#) provided effective treatment of sore throat symptoms.

"There's no shortage of remedies put forward for sore throats," said Dr. Jack Ende, president of the American College of Physicians. "It's the old axiom that if there are a lot of treatments suggested, no single one actually works."

People with a simple sore throat should try gargling with salt water, downing a spoonful of honey or taking aspirin, ibuprofen or acetaminophen to help them feel better, Ende advised.

Also, look for typical cold symptoms. If you're sneezing or coughing, you probably don't have strep throat, he said.

"Wait it out, and do not go to your doctor's office," Ende said. "He or she has nothing to offer, and all you'll do is potentially infect others in the waiting room."

People with more serious symptoms—a high fever or swollen glands—are more likely to have strep and should go to the doctor, Ende said.

Your doctor might prescribe antibiotics for your [strep throat](#), but don't be surprised if you aren't provided any, Ende and Moore said.

"It gets better on its own. It really does," Ende said. "Antibiotics shorten the course by a day or two, but that's all."

However, the CDC says antibiotics are prescribed for [strep](#) to prevent rheumatic fever.

The study was published Dec. 18 in the journal *CMAJ*.

More information: Michael Moore, MSc, professor, primary health care research, University of Southampton, United Kingdom; Jack Ende, M.D., president, American College of Physicians; Dec. 18, 2017, *CMAJ* (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*), [Abstract/Full Text](#)

For more on sore throat, visit the [Infectious Diseases Society of America](#)

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Citation: Will these two home remedies help your sore throat? (2017, December 18) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-12-home-remedies-sore-throat.html>

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