A Gallery of Gargles: 8 of my favorite home remedies for a clear, healthy voice by Susan Berkley

First, a disclaimer. These “home remedies” are not meant to substitute for professional medical advice. See a doctor immediately if a swollen throat effects your breathing or ability to swallow or if sore throat is accompanied by a fever or if soreness or hoarseness persists.

1. Dr. Lawrence’s favorite gargle recipe:

Renowned throat Doctor, Dr. Van Lawrence often recommended a favorite gargle recipe: 1/2 tsp. of salt, 1/2 tsp. of baking soda, 1/2 tsp. of clear corn syrup, and 6 oz. of warmed, distilled water. Gargle quietly and gently for two long, boring minutes. Do not rinse and use as often as necessary to help your dry, irritated throat.

2. Good old salt and warm water

I mix about a teaspoon of salt in 8 ozs of very warm water and gargle away. The salt reduces any inflammation in the throat or mouth and will generally make you feel better. I also use (and love) the neti pot. The neti pot is a little container designed for irrigating the nasal passages with saline solution. You can buy one on line or at most health food stores. Follow the instructions that come with the neti pot. I use a saline solution of ¼ tsp non-iodized salt in 8 oz of warm filtered or bottled water. Works great. Clears the sinuses and seems to ward off colds. Warm salt water washes away mucus and increases circulation of the body’s natural disease fighting antibodies in the area.

3. Apple Cider Vinegar

Mix 1 tsp to 2 T (if you can stand it) of apple cider vinegar in a glass of water. Gargle. Then rinse your mouth with clear water to prevent the acidity in the vinegar from eroding the enamel of your teeth. Do this every hour if you have a sore throat. I will often add some honey to the vinegar water and sip it slowly. Home remedy enthusiasts say the vinegar helps kill bacteria in the throat. I don’t know if this is true, but it makes me feel better and also helps my digestion.

4. Aloe vera juice

Gargle with aloe vera juice two times daily. The juice of this plant is very soothing.

5. Cayenne pepper Add 1/2 teaspoon of cayenne pepper to 1 cup of boiling water; stir well and gargle while mixture is very warm. This brings more circulation to the throat, helping your body to heal itself.
6. Ginger  Peel a small ginger root. Slice the root and boil in a small pot of water. It’s done when the water turns yellow. Add three tablespoons of honey. Gargle with the warm tea and then swallow. Good stuff! Ginger will help bring lots of blood flow to your throat and that’s a good thing!

7. Lemon and salt  Here’s one that’s old as the hills. Add the juice of one lemon and one teaspoon of salt to one cup of warm water. Gargle three times a day for one minute. Rinse your mouth with clear water afterwards to clear the acidity from your mouth.

8. Mustard  Grind one tablespoon of mustard seed and combine with the juice of half a lemon, one tablespoon of salt, one tablespoon of clear honey, and 1 1/4 cups of boiling water. Leave this mixture, covered, for 15 minutes and use as a gargle.

A few words about throat lozenges and a surprising warning about aspirin:

Every throat doctor and speech pathologist I have interviewed says that menthol can dry out the throat and the vocal folds. Better to suck on a glycerin, honey, or herb based lozenge. Check the label to see if they contain menthol. Avoid strong breath mints on heavy speaking days. The most soothing lozenges of all contain slippery elm. You can find them in the health food store. I like a tea called “throat coat” which contains licorice and slippery elm.

I was also surprised to learn that because aspirin is a blood thinner, it can increase the likelihood of burst capillaries in the throat (not a good thing). Speech Pathologist Dr. Susan Miller advises not to take aspirin before singing, yelling (such as at a sporting event) or public speaking where you might have to raise your voice. Before such events, use non-aspirin pain relievers instead.

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