

YOUR GPS CAN TREAT THESE CONDITIONS!

n January 2014, Eastern Health Alliance (EHA) launched the GPFirst programme to encourage patients in eastern Singapore to see their general practitioners (GPs) for mild to moderate medical conditions rather than heading to the Emergency Department first. In this regular series, our EHA community GPs step in to help with common ailments *Caring* readers might face.

Visit **www.gpfirst.sg** or see your GP for more information on common conditions such as cuts, bruises, mild scalds, nausea, nosebleeds, headaches, sprains and fevers. Read on to learn more about acute tonsillitis and dengue fever.

ACUTE TONSILLITIS

Question: I am an active 24-year-old who plays a lot of sports. For the past few days, I have been having sore throat, difficulty swallowing, and also slight ear pain. At one point, my fever spiked to 39.7°C even after taking paracetamol. I tried to examine my throat using a mirror and could see that my tonsils were bright red and had white spots around it. I am very worried as I have never had such painful enlarged tonsils like this before, accompanied by a fever. Should I head to the A&E for such a condition?

Answer: The symptoms of high fever, sore throat, difficulty in swallowing and slight pain in the ear that you experienced are consistent with upper respiratory tract infection. Having bright red and white spots on your tonsils in your throat is suggestive of an acute tonsillitis. A possible cause to exclude would be a middle ear infection.

Tonsillitis occurs when the throat and tonsils became infected with bacteria or virus.

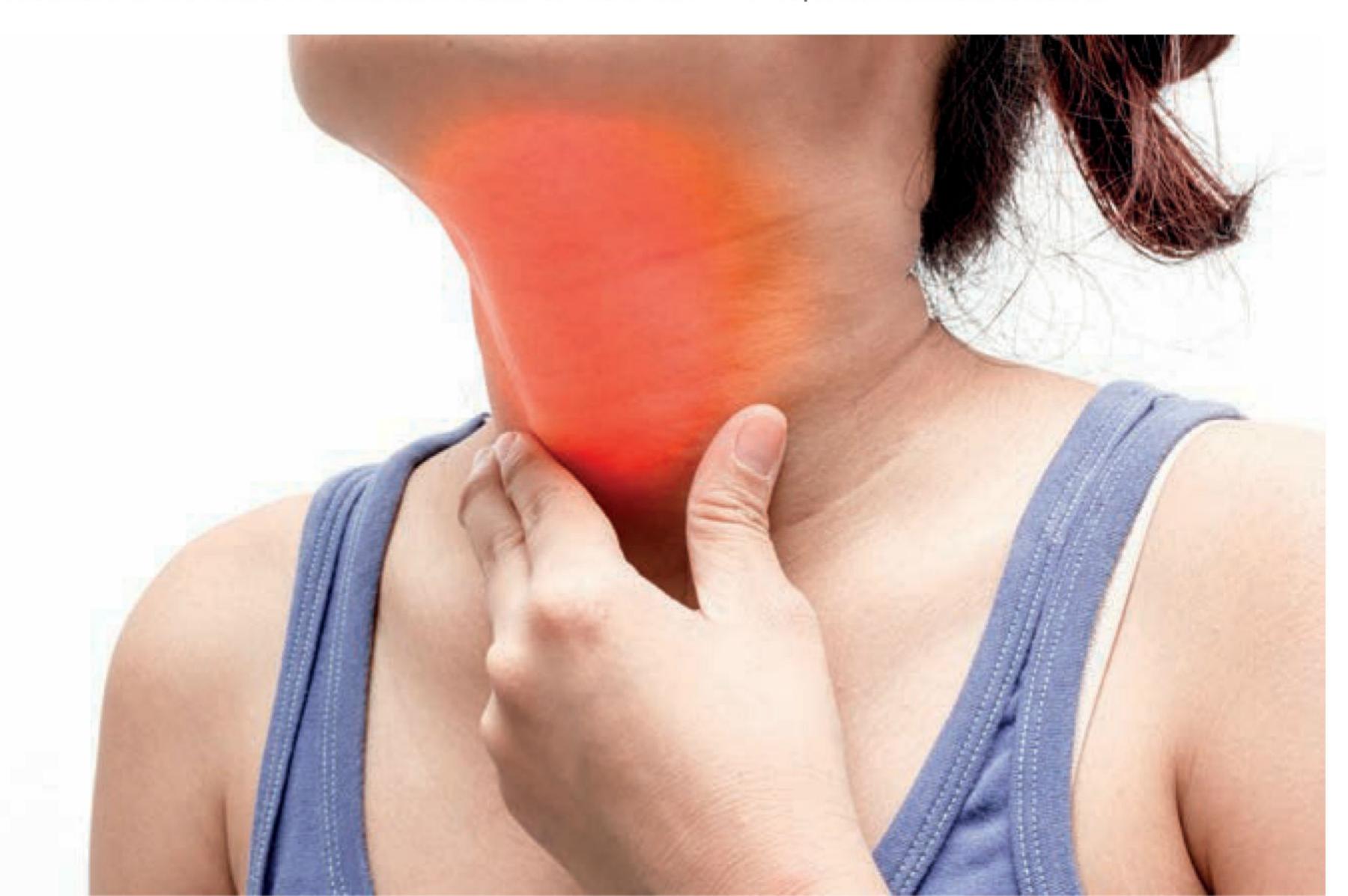
They are the two red lumps, which look like small grapes, that act as a guardian to our airway. Many times, microbes such as bacteria or virus get picked up by tonsils during breathing or ingestion of food.

Our tonsils contain lymphoid tissues, which act as our body defenses against foreign microbial invasion. Quite often, we do not feel anything when these reactions happen but unfortunately, for some of us, our tonsils do get infected. Such reaction becomes so intense that the fever and throat swelling happen, due to the chemical release during the inflammatory reaction. The tonsillar bodies also swell up during those times, which sometimes makes it difficult to swallow. Occasionally, we also feel nauseated due to the swollen tonsils.

Overall, tonsillitis can be treated by GPs and very often, it is due to streptococcal infection. Most GPs will prescribe a basic course of antibiotics to clear the infection first, followed by some medications to reduce the pain and swelling. It is advisable to take a course of soft diet (non-fried or non-spicy food) to reduce throat irritation and swallowing discomfort. It is also recommended to use an



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antiseptic mouth gargle to clear the throat. Hydration is also important for individuals with high fever or poor appetite.

Occasionally, surgery may be required for patients who are unresponsive to treatment or those with very frequent relapses. Visit your GP first as he or she can assess your condition and provide you with relevant treatment options and advice.

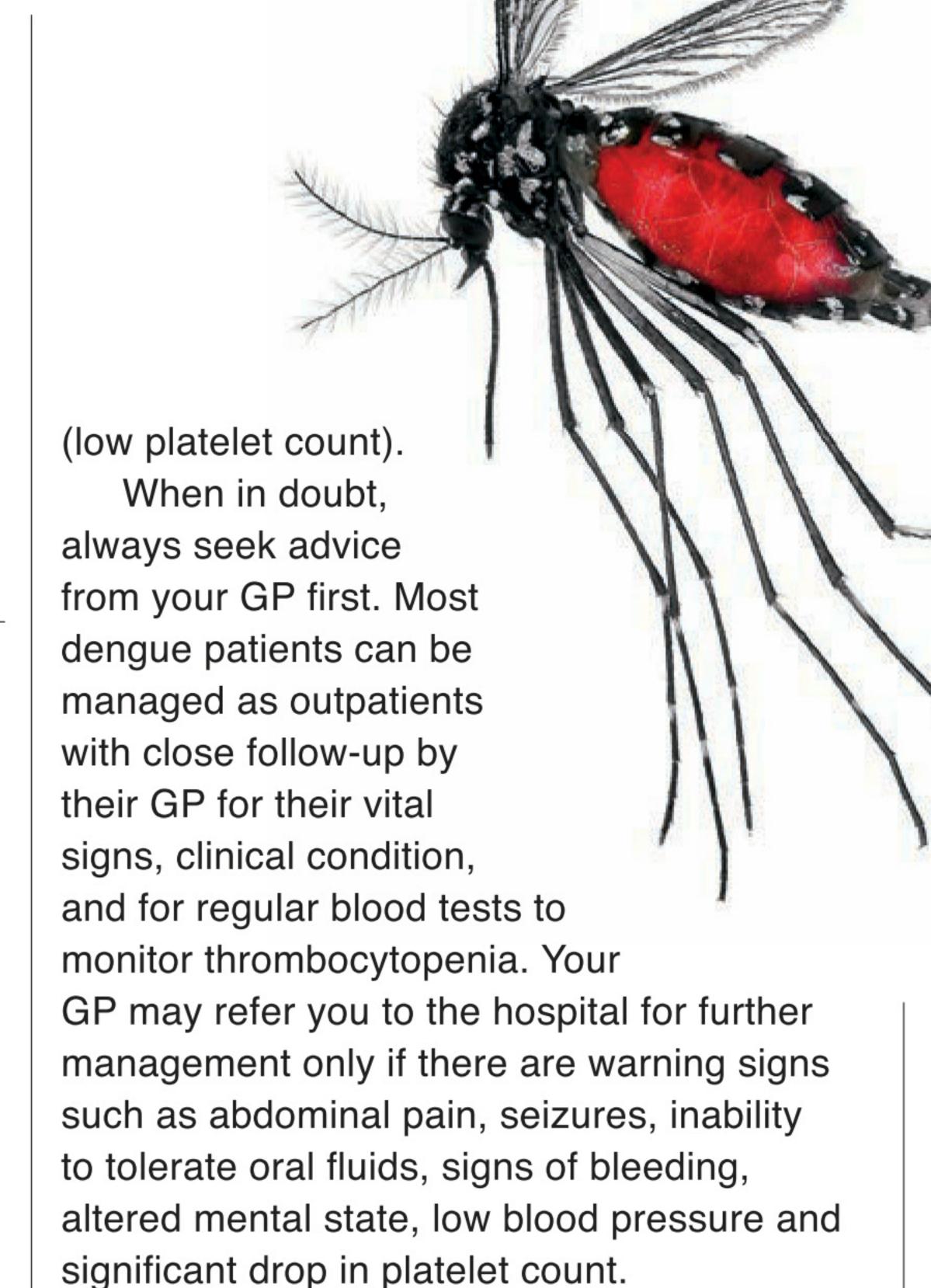
Dr Lye Tong Fong

DENGUE FEVER

Question: I am a 30-year-old male and I have been having a high fever for three days now, and it persists despite selfmedication with paracetamol. I have been feeling lethargic and find it hard to get up from bed as my joints hurt. I initially thought it was a regular flu or viral infection until I experienced a terrible headache that comes with pain in my eyes. As my vicinity lies within the active dengue cluster, I suspect that I may have been infected with dengue fever. I read in an article that a blood test can diagnose dengue, and I wonder if my regular GP provides such services as it would be very inconvenient for me to make multiple visits to the hospital because I am working.

Answer: It is likely that you have dengue fever and should head to your GP instead of the A&E. Your GP will conduct a thorough assessment to confirm the diagnosis and to exclude other possible causes via a complete history-taking and examination. Advantages of visiting a GP first include: shorter waiting times; he/she may be more familiar with your medical history and other comorbidities; and also provides for a better continuity of care as you would require regular follow-ups if diagnosed with dengue.

Dengue fever is a disease caused by a virus and is transmitted through Aedes mosquito bites. Common symptoms of dengue include a fever that lasts for two to seven days, headache, body aches and joint pain, rash and abdominal discomfort. If dengue is suspected, a blood test that includes a full blood count and dengue serology/dengue NS1 antigen assay can be done to confirm the diagnosis and to look for thrombocytopenia



Here's some advice if you are diagnosed with dengue, or are suspected to have dengue:

- Ensure adequate rest and fluid intake to prevent dehydration.
- Monitor for signs of bleeding such as gum bleeding after brushing, nosebleed, sticky black stools, easy bruising, etc.
- Avoid medications containing aspirin or NSAIDs (non-steroidal antiinflammatory drugs) as these can increase your risk of bleeding.
- You will need regular follow-ups with your GP until he/she informs you that you no longer require close monitoring.
- Protect yourself and your household members from mosquito bites by using mosquito repellent, mosquito coils, etc.
- Vector control: Prevent breeding of the Aedes mosquito that carries the dengue virus by removing stagnant water from your premises.

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