



Helping you decide about tonsil surgery for your child

About tonsillitis

Your tonsils can be found on either side of the back of your throat. When they become swollen and inflamed, we call this tonsillitis. This is usually caused by an infection from viruses or bacteria. Tonsillitis is a common illness in children. Most childhood tonsillitis is caused by viruses. Your child will be ill with a sore throat and a fever.

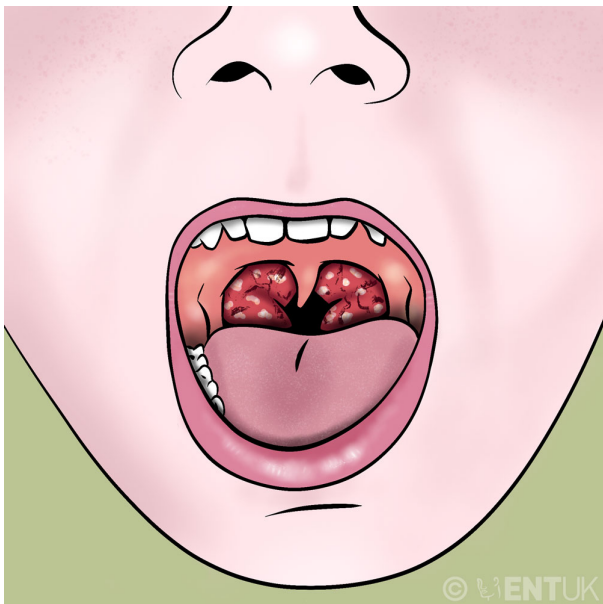


Figure 1. Large, infected tonsils (red and covered in white spots or pus)

Managing your child's symptoms

There are some simple ways you can help your child's tonsillitis. You can use paracetamol (Calpol, for example), or ibuprofen, or both. If your child is old enough, you can also use soothing treatments, such as over-the-counter throat lozenges and throat sprays. Gargling with a mild antiseptic or warm, salty water can also help. Most cases get better within a week.

Your child does not need antibiotics for viral sore throats and viral tonsillitis.

Watchful waiting

This means making a note of how often the infections happen and how bad they are. This helps you see if they are getting better or worse. You can keep a **Tonsil Diary** on a sheet of paper or keep notes in your mobile phone. You should still manage your child's symptoms when they appear.

If your child's tonsillitis is caused by bacteria, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics. These can help treat the infection.

What next? Deciding about surgery

Surgery involves having an operation called tonsillectomy to take the tonsils out. This is done while your child is asleep under a general anaesthetic.

This **may** be an option if your child has had:

- seven or more sore throats in the last year that have been bad enough for you to take them to a doctor

or

- five or more sore throats like this in the last two years

or

- three or more sore throats like this in the last three years.
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Tonsillectomy

Tonsillectomy can help your child's symptoms, but as with any surgery, there are risks involved. It is important that you understand the possible risks when deciding what to do.

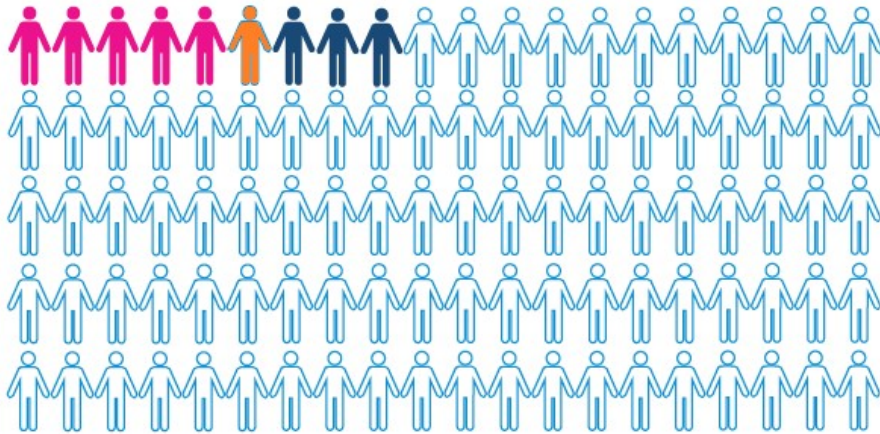
Going back to the hospital

Almost 1 in 10 children (9%) who have a tonsillectomy have to go back to the hospital afterwards because of complications.

- **Bleeding:** Just over 1 in 20 children (6%) have bleeding which means they must go back to the hospital.
- **Further surgery:** 1 out of 100 children (1%) who have bleeding need a second operation to make it stop.
- **Other reasons:** About 1 child in 33 who has a tonsillectomy (3%) feels pain, vomits or has an infection bad enough that they must go back to hospital for treatment.

6% are readmitted to hospital with bleeding; 1% need a second operation to stop bleeding

3% have pain, vomiting or an infection bad enough to need hospital admission



Blood transfusion

One child in five hundred needs a blood transfusion after surgery.

Other rare problems include **damage to teeth** and **short-term changes** in how things taste.

Things to think about when deciding if surgery is the right choice for your child.

Things to think about	Non-surgical management (such as painkillers and antibiotics)	Surgery (tonsillectomy)
Inconvenience	Your child may keep needing time off school or nursery. They may need to keep visiting the GP.	Most children need about 10-14 days off school or nursery.
Pain	Your child might get more sore throats because of tonsillitis.	Your child might have 7-10 days of bad pain after surgery.
Short-term risks	Your child might have mild side effects from antibiotics. One in ten children have tummy upset or diarrhoea. One in fifteen has a mild allergic reaction such as a cough or skin rash. Serious allergic reactions are rare.	See above for the risks of surgery. There are also risks from the general anaesthetic. These include nausea and vomiting. Serious risks from a general anaesthetic are rare.
Long-term risks	Regular use of antibiotics may mean they stop working so well.	Scarring in the throat.
Long-term outcome	Your child's tonsillitis may settle down without surgery.	Surgery will mean your child gets tonsillitis less often. They may still get some sore throats due to viruses.

What is important to you and your child?

Use these questions to think about what matters to you and your child. This should help you to decide about surgery for your child.

I do not want my child to have a treatment with a risk of complications



Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

The most important thing is that my child has fewer sore throats



Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

I don't mind waiting and see if my child gets better on their own



Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

I have concerns about my child having an operation and a general anaesthetic



Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

Tonsillitis has stopped my child doing things at home and at school or nursery



Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

I want a treatment that means my child does not have to take time off school.



Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

ENT UK would like to thank the authors and reviewers for their contribution

***Disclaimer:** This publication is designed for the information of patients. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the information contained may not be comprehensive and patients should not act upon it without seeking professional advice.*

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