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TONSILS AND ADENOIDS

What are tonsils and adenoids?

Tonsils are oval-shaped mounds of tissue on both sides of the back of the throat. Adenoids are similar to tonsils but they are located higher in the throat, behind the nasal cavity. These tissues are part of the body's immune system that helps to fight infections. However, the body has other parts in the immune system that have the same function so that the immune system is not affected when the tonsils and adenoids are removed.

Why do tonsils and adenoids need to be removed?

Tonsils and adenoids can cause problems if they get too big. They can narrow the airway in the back of the throat and this can cause snoring or obstructive sleep apnea. Obstructive sleep apnea is the repeated pauses of breathing during sleep. It is associated with poor-quality sleep as well as more serious conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, or lung disease. In children it can cause poor school performance, inability to concentrate, and behavioral problems. In adults it can also cause an increased incidence of heart attacks, strokes, and heart failure. Removing the enlarged tonsils and adenoids can often improve or cure the sleep apnea.

Another problem with tonsils and adenoids is recurrent infections. Patients who have frequent episodes of tonsillitis may have much less frequent throat infections if the tonsils are removed. Adenoids can also be linked to ear infections. Sometimes children with recurrent ear infections will have improvement if the adenoids are removed.

What are the benefits of tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy?

Patients who have obstructive sleep apnea because of enlarged tonsils or adenoids, removing these tissues will often dramatically improve or cure the obstructive sleep apnea. Patients who have frequent episodes of tonsillitis and/or adenoiditis, removing the tonsils and adenoids will significantly reduce the frequency of these infections.

What happens during surgery to remove tonsils and adenoids?

Tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy are performed under general anesthesia in the operating room. Patients must not eat or drink anything after midnight before the surgery. Once the patient is asleep, the surgeon uses several instruments to remove the tonsils and adenoids through the mouth. Usually, this is done as day surgery, meaning that he or she may go home on the same day as surgery.



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What to expect after surgery?

Diet: The most important dietary consideration after tonsillectomy is that getting plenty of fluids. We encourage patients to drink at least 2-3 ounces every waking hour for the first few days. Water, fruit juices, Gatorade, Popsicles, and Jello are good sources of liquids. This will prevent dehydration, which will in turn help ease discomfort in the throat because they are making enough saliva. They should not use a straw because it may poke the back of the throat and cause bleeding. Start with soft foods that are easy to chew and swallow. Examples include pudding, mashed potatoes, noodle soup, scrambled eggs, pancakes, yogurt, etc. Avoid foods that are hard or crunchy or hot and spicy. Avoid carbonated beverages.

Pain: It is normal to have a very sore throat and/or bad ear pain after surgery. The ears hurt because the same nerve that goes to the throat also goes to the ear. Your doctor will give you prescription pain medicine after surgery. Use this as directed as needed for pain. If your child still appears to be having pain then you may give liquid ibuprofen (over-the-counter) so that you can alternate ibuprofen and the prescription pain medicine. It is common for children to need pain medicine for 7 days or sometimes longer.

Fever: It is normal for patients to have fever for the first few days after surgery. The prescription pain medicine has Tylenol in it so additional Tylenol should not be given. Getting plenty of fluids will help reduce the fever. You can also alternate ibuprofen and prescription pain as stated above.

Activity: The patient should rest for 2-3 days after surgery. As they feel better they can gradually increase activity. Usually they will be ready to return to school in 7-10 days but there is not a set time when they will be ready. They should return to school when they feel better and are not requiring the pain medicine during the day. They should not perform any strenuous activity such as swimming or sports for 14 days.

Bad Breath: This is normal after surgery because there will be scabs in the back of the throat as it heals. The scabs tend to have a tan or yellow color and this is normal. They will slough off about 7-10 days after surgery.

Bleeding: If the patient has a small amount of bleeding from the mouth then have them rinse their mouth with cold water and notify your doctor. If the bleeding continues or if there is a lot of bleeding then call your ear, nose, and throat doctor immediately and take your child to the emergency room to be checked. Rarely, a patient may have to go back to the operating room if there is significant ongoing bleeding.



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Call your doctor immediately if they have:

- significant bleeding
- fever higher than 102°F
- vomiting that lasts more than 6 hours
- difficulty breathing
- lethargy, excessive sleepiness—this can be a sign that the pain medication needs to be decreased