

Tonsillectomy

(with or without adenoidectomy)



What are tonsils?

They are one of the many places in your body that hold special tissues and cells to help fight off infections.

Why are tonsils removed?

Tonsils are removed to prevent:

- repeated attacks of tonsillitis
- breathing problems during sleep.

What are adenoids?

They are tonsil-like tissue at the back of the nose. They usually start to shrink around the age of 8 and should be completely gone by the time you are an adult.

Why are adenoids removed?

Adenoids are removed to:

- treat "glue ear"
- prevent breathing problems during sleep.

What does the operation involve?

This operation is performed under a general anaesthetic usually as a day case. You will need two weeks off work (or school) after the operation.

The surgeon will remove the tonsils from the back of your throat. There are three main methods that are used; one involves just surgical instruments and ties ('cold steel'), or using electrocautery ('bipolar tonsillectomy), and very commonly in children with OSA the Coblation method is used ('intracapsular tonsillectomy').

Your surgeon will discuss the method with you and answer any questions you may have.

Removing the tonsils using any of these methods will leave two raw patches that need to heal.

Stitches may be needed in the back of the throat, which will dissolve.

Most patients find that their throat is very painful after this operation. Swallowing is uncomfortable, but it is very important that you eat as normally as possible. This helps to:

- clean the operation site. This can reduce the risk of bleeding or infection
- stop the muscles at the back of your throat going into spasm, by using them to swallow. Any muscle spasm makes the pain much worse.

The pain may get worse after three to four days, but will improve by the end of the first week.

If your adenoids are removed, this will leave a raw patch at the back of your nose. This is not as painful as the tonsil operation.

What are the possible complications?

- Infection.
- Bleeding. This may happen during the first two weeks while the throat is healing. Very occasionally you may need to go back to the operating theatre for an operation to stop the bleeding. Some tiny flecks of blood are normal, but if there is any more than this contact your GP immediately, or go to casualty as you may need to be readmitted to hospital.

- Taste disturbance. Some patients may notice this as an altered sense of taste that occasionally can be severe, but is usually temporary.

What will happen if I don't have the operation?

This operation is not essential. If you decide not to have surgery, your tonsil infections and/or breathing problem may persist.

After your operation:

- Take two weeks off from work or school
- Eat a normal diet
- Take regular painkillers in the first week (we suggest that you time these 30 minutes before meals)
- Contact your GP or the hospital if you have any problems such as bleeding. Your GP may need to refer you back to the hospital.

Contact us

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