



C O M M U N I T Y



Ear, Nose, Throat, and Allergy

Adult Tonsillectomy

What are the tonsils & adenoids?

The tonsils are grape-sized pieces of tissue in the back of the throat on each side. The adenoids are small pads of tissue at the back of the nose above the throat. Both tonsils & adenoids produce antibodies to fight infections. They are usually removed if they become so large that they interfere with breathing or swallowing, or because of recurring or chronic infections occur.

How long will it take to recover?

After removal of tonsils, most adults have significant pain for 10 -14 days, some up to 3 weeks. Because adults & teenagers have larger tonsils and more developed throat muscles, pain and muscle spasm can make it difficult to swallow for 2 weeks or more. Constipation may occur because narcotic pain medication, when taken regularly, can slow down the bowels.

What can I expect following a tonsillectomy?

1. **Diet.** The most important thing is to keep well hydrated. This will help lessen problems with fever, constipation, and healing. Make an effort to drink 3 or 4 ounces every hour during waking hours for the first 2 days after surgery. Soft drinks, fruit juice nectars, Jell-O, custards, popsicles, or sports drinks are good choices. Frequent small feedings of soft foods and cool liquids usually are most comfortable. As your appetite gets better, eat solid foods. Eat your favorite foods, but avoid chips, crackers, and foods with sharp edges. You should not drink through a straw after surgery until your throat is completely healed. This may increase the risk of bleeding.
2. **Pain Medicines.** A very sore throat or **ear pain** is normal after the tonsils are removed. Expect pain in the ears between the 3rd and 10th days, because the same nerve that goes to the tonsils also goes to the ears. Take regular dose of pain medication (such as Tylenol) 4 to 5 times a day for a week. If you have severe pain, use the prescription pain medicine as labeled. **DO NOT USE ASPIRIN OR IBUPROFEN** because these medicines increase the chance of bleeding. You can use cool compresses or ice packs on your neck to help you feel more comfortable. You can also suck on ice chips or chew gum. In dry months a humidifier can be placed at bedside to add moisture to the air and soothe the throat. Gargling with room temperature salt water may help.
3. **Fever Medicines.** It is normal to run a fever between 99F (37C) and 102F (38C) for the first few days after surgery. The fever will be worse if you do not drink enough liquids and become dehydrated. Take acetaminophen for the fever.
4. **Bad Breath.** This is normal. It comes from a white to yellowish scab that forms over the tonsil surgery site.
5. **Bleeding.** There should be no bleeding from the nose or mouth after you return home. If there is any bleeding, try gargling with ice water or drinking ice water. If the bleeding does not stop in 20 minutes, go to the emergency room immediately. The ENT doctor on call will be notified. Between the 5th and 10th days after surgery, the scabs break off the surgery site and you may spit up some bloody mucous.
6. **Activity.** It is best for you to rest at home for the first 48 hours after surgery. Activity may be slowly increased as you gain strength. There is no rule for the right time to go back to work or school. A general guideline is 10 – 14 days after the tonsils are taken out most can drive, go back to school, or do sedentary activities. Working out or contact sports should not be performed until 14 days after tonsil surgery. Jobs requiring strenuous work should not be restarted for 2 weeks following surgery.

7. **Other Medications.**

8. **Follow-up Appointment After Discharge**

You need to be rechecked and you have an appointment on _____ at
_____ o'clock with _____.

When should I call my ENT doctor?

CALL IMMEDIATELY IF:

- There is any bleeding from the mouth or vomiting of blood that does not stop with ice water gargles.
- The fever goes over 102F (39C).
- There are any signs of dehydration.
- Vomiting that lasts more than 12 hours.

CALL DURING OFFICE HOURS IF:

- A fever lasts more than 3 days.
- You have other questions or concerns.

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