



# CommunityENT

EAR • NOSE • THROAT • ALLERGY

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## Adult Tonsillectomy +/- Adenoidectomy Post Operative Instructions

### What are the Tonsils and Adenoids?

The tonsils are grape sized tissue on each side of the back of the throat. The adenoids are small pads of tissue in the back of the nose. The adenoids and tonsils produce antibodies to help fight infection. They are removed if they get too large and start to interfere with breathing (snoring) or swallowing, or for recurrent or chronic infections.

### What happens during surgery?

During surgery, you are asleep under general anesthesia. This surgery usually takes less than 1 hour. The tonsil +/- adenoids are removed and the residual tonsil/adenoid bed is cauterized. Cauterization is when you apply heat to the residual tonsil and adenoid bed. This method causes less bleeding and is a more precise and complete way of removing the tissues. For most adults, this is an out-patient procedure. However, some patients need to stay in the hospital overnight for monitoring.

### What are the possible complications?

Sore throat, headache, fever (common for 24 hours post-op) and bad breath are common. *Pain in the ears should be expected after a tonsillectomy.*

Typically the throat pain is the worst 4 to 8 days after the surgery. Adults and teenagers experience significantly more pain than children after this surgery

Infection is rare and can be treated with antibiotics.

Electrocautery is used in tonsil and adenoidectomies and in rare cases can cause burns to the tongue or lips. These typically heal on their own, but there is always a risk of a more significant burn.

Removal of the tonsil/adenoid tissue can rarely cause changes in the resonance of the voice.

Dehydration is a serious complication. Due to the sore throat after surgery, it may be difficult to eat or drink. Fever, nausea, dry mouth, failure to make urine or tears are all signs of dehydration. If the patient will not eat or drink after surgery, they may need to go to the hospital for IV fluids. Some patients may require hospital admission.

Airway compromise. While rare, the tonsils are in the airway and swelling, bleeding or secretions can cause difficulty breathing. This can cause snoring, loud breathing, airway obstruction or death. Patients with Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) are more at risk for complications. We keep the patient in the recovery room until we are confident the airway is stable, but even with caution rare problems can occur.

Bleeding. Post-operative bleeding can occur and can be life-threatening. Most bleeds are easily controlled with ice water gargles and drinking cold water. In rare cases, these bleeds require a patient to return to the operating room to control the bleeding. If you have bleeding, we recommend ice water gargles and an ice pack to the neck. If the bleeding does not stop within 15 minutes, you will need to call the office and speak to the physician on call and go to the Emergency Room. It is common between 5-10 days after surgery to experience mild bleeding or spitting up bloody mucus as the scabs break off from the back of the throat.

### **What can I expect after surgery?**

You can expect that you might not experience significant pain for the first few days after surgery. The throat pain typically peaks out around 4-8 days after surgery.

You will be given a liquid pain medicine. Take this as directed for pain.

Even with pain medication, the pain after surgery can be difficult to control

This pain medicine can cause nausea, vomiting or constipation.

You can use Tylenol once you stop taking the prescription pain medicine.

If you run out of prescription pain medicine and feel you need more, please call 1-2 days before you will run out. A provider will call you to discuss if a refill is appropriate. Do not use Aspirin. Ibuprofen may be allowed after surgery, depending on your doctor's recommendations. These medications may increase your risk of bleeding.

### **What do I need to at home**

You need to rest at home for the first 48 hours after surgery. You should not be left alone for the first 2 weeks after surgery due to the risk of bleeding

Start with cool, clear liquids as soon as you feel like drinking. Make an effort to drink 3-4 oz of liquid every hour while you are awake for the first 2 days after surgery. *Avoid any food or drink with red dye.* It can be confusing if you throw up, whether it is blood or not. We encourage a soft diet (jell-o, popsicles, pasta, apple sauce etc) until your throat is completely healed. Chips, crackers and foods with sharp edges should be avoided.

Activity can be increased slowly as your strength increases.

We typically recommend adults stay off work for 10-14 days after a tonsillectomy. Sports and exercising should be avoided for 2 weeks.

### **When do you follow-up?**

Follow-up is typically 14-21 days after surgery

### **When should I call my doctor?**

You should call your doctor if your child experiences any bleeding from the mouth or nose.

Your fever goes over 102F (39C) or your fever lasts more than 3 days

There are signs of dehydration (fever, lethargy, not making urine, dry mouth or nausea)

You have been vomiting for more than 12 hours