

Just for Kids



Tonsils and Tonsillectomy

What are tonsils?

Tonsils are the two pink lumps of tissue found on each side of the back of your throat. (Open your mouth wide and say 'ahhhh' in front of a mirror to see them.) Each grape-size fights off the bad bacteria or germs living in your body.

What is tonsillitis?

Bacteria (bad germs) are tiny living things that can cause sickness and infection. Too many bad germs on your tonsils can make you sick. This is what your doctor calls tonsillitis (ton-sil-lie-tis), or an infection in one or both of your tonsils.

Do you think you have tonsillitis? A symptom is a signal that something is wrong with your body. Talk with Mom and Dad if you see or feel:

- Bright red tonsils
- White or yellow goo covering your tonsils
- A sore throat
- Pain when you swallow
- Pain or swelling in your neck
- A hot forehead
- Stinky breath even after you've brushed your teeth



Will I have to visit the doctor?

If you have tonsillitis symptoms, your parents will probably take you to see a doctor usually a pediatrician, or doctor for children. During your visit, the doctor will:

- Ask questions about your symptoms and how long you've had them
- Look at and feel your head, neck, and throat with a tongue depressor, small mirror, or lighted instrument
- Look in your ears
- Perform a few tests, like x-rays, blood tests, or throat cultures, to find out exactly what's making you sick

Once your doctor examines the results, he or she will decide if you have tonsillitis.

What happens after the doctor says I have tonsillitis?

If your doctor decides you have tonsillitis, he will probably give you an antibiotic, a medicine that gets rid of bad bacteria. If you have tonsillitis a lot, your doctor will contact an otolaryngologist (oh-toe-lair-in-goll-oh-gist), a doctor who specializes in taking care of the ears, nose, and throat. This doctor might tell you to take some more antibiotics but if your throat continues to hurt, you might be told you need a tonsillectomy.

What is a tonsillectomy?

A tonsillectomy (ton-seh-**leck**-teh-me) is an operation where your tonsils are taken out of your throat. If you have tonsillitis a lot, or if your tonsils get really big and you have trouble breathing, your doctor and parents may decide they need to be removed.

What happens when I have a tonsillectomy?

After dinner the night before your tonsillectomy, you won't be allowed to eat or drink anything -- even water!

When you arrive at the hospital, you'll put on a special bracelet with your name on it and hospital clothes. Then you will meet the doctors and nurses that will be helping you. When the doctor is ready, you'll be given a special medicine that makes you fall asleep. Then, the doctor and nurses will use special tools to remove your tonsils. It doesn't take very long -- just about 20 minutes!

When you wake up, you will be with your Mom or Dad and the operation will be all over. Your throat will hurt but the nurses and doctors will keep an eye on you to make sure you're okay. In a few hours you will be ready to go home. Your throat will be sore for a few weeks, but your tonsils won't bother you ever again!

What happens after I get home?

When you get home, be sure to drink a lot and get lots of rest. It will help to keep your throat moist and your body energized. You can eat non-dairy popsicles and other cold treats or soft food that makes your throat feel better, but save ice cream for the next day. Ice cream and other milk products can make your throat worse right after the operation. Within two weeks, you'll be back to school and better than ever!

Facts about tonsils:

By the time you leave junior high school most of your classmates will have had tonsillitis. This illness typically affects kids between five and 15 years old.

Adults can get tonsillitis too! Some will even need a tonsillectomy.

George Washington died of a sudden throat infection, called 'quinsy' at the time. He developed an abscess in the back of his throat several days after helping a carriage out of the snow. The most respected doctors in the country were called to Mt. Vernon, but were unable to help him.



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